

Contrastive Focus Structure in Mandarin Chinese

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This paper examines two types of cleft constructions in Mandarin Chinese *shi* and *shi...de*, trying to determine if both or which one are/is truly the construction(s) for marking contrastive focus. After showing that the *shi...de* cleft construction has several peculiarities that are not expected for a construction marking contrastive focus and on the other hand the *shi* cleft construction does not have any of them, I conclude that only the *shi* cleft is a marked construction for contrastive focus in Mandarin, despite all the apparent similarities it shares with *shi...de*. Additionally, the structures of the two types of clefts are discussed, with the conclusions that *shi* is the copula in both clefts, *de* is the attributive marker and both clefts are essentially equational sentences.

1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with one specific question in the information structuring of Mandarin Chinese. This study is based on a basic but important assumption, namely, Mandarin uses its formal structure (phonology, syntax, etc.) to manifest pragmatic notions such as topic and focus. It is generally agreed that Mandarin is a discourse configurational language (Xu 2002) and topic-prominent language (Li et al. 1981). It is also shown in Li (2005) that topic, as a syntactic component, occurs at the sentence-initial position preceding subject. Similarly, some studies show that Mandarin also uses formal devices to manifest focus, either through a sentence pitch accent or a specific syntactic position in the sentence, or both (Xu 2004). In this paper, I will investigate how a particular type of focus, namely contrastive focus, is manifested in Mandarin Chinese.

1.1. Focus, Informational Focus and Contrastive Focus

I follow the definition of focus in Lambrecht (1994) as follows.

(1) Focus: The semantic component of a pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition. (p213).

Lambrecht defines assertion and presupposition as follows.

(2) Assertion: The proposition expressed by a sentence which the hearer is expected to know or take for granted as a result of hearing the sentence uttered. (p52)

(3) Presupposition: The set of propositions lexicographically evoked in a sentence which the speaker assumes the hearer already knows or is ready to take for granted at the time the sentence is uttered. (p52)

Based on Lambrecht's definitions, we can represent focus with the following formula:

(4) Focus = Assertion – Presupposition.

A *wh*-question/answer sequence is often used as a diagnostic for focus. The part in the answer that is not in the question is considered the focus. For example, in (5), *a cake* in the answer is the focus and the presupposition is the proposition 'Susan brought something to the party'.

(5) Q: What did Susan bring to the party?

A: She brought a cake to the party.

Many versions of subclassification of focus have been proposed in the literature. A most common one is to classify focus into two subtypes according to whether the focused item is in contrast with other alternatives in a limited set. The noncontrastive type and the contrastive type assume different names in different studies. Examples are *rheme vs. kontrast* (Vallduvi & Vilkuna 1998), *information focus vs. identification focus* (Kiss 1998), *informational focus vs. operational focus* (Roberts 1998) and *informational focus and contrastive focus* (Xu 2002). Here I follow Xu (2002) and use the terms *informational focus* and *contrastive focus* because of their transparency. Contrastive focus is not only the part by which an assertion differs from its presupposition (that is, it must at first be informational focus), it is also associated with two unique properties Exhaustiveness and Exclusiveness as proposed in Kiss (1998). The first property describes that the constituent under contrastive focus in a sentence is a complete list of the entities that make the truth value of the proposition true. The second property says that those and only those entities under contrastive focus will make the truth value of the proposition true, excluding other entities. For example, it is generally agreed that English cleft sentences 'it is/was...that/who...' is a construction for contrastive focus (Rochemont 1986), the element after 'it is/was' is under contrastive focus. It indeed has these two properties. Let us look at the following sentence.

(6) It was a hat and a shirt that Mary bought yesterday.

For the truth value of (6) to be true, a hat and a shirt must be all the things (exhaustiveness) and the only things Mary bought (exclusiveness). If Mary bought a hat, a shirt and also a pair of shoes, (6) is false. This shows a clear contrast from

informational focus. Let us assume *a hat and a shirt* is the informational focus in (7) below.

(7) Mary bought a hat and a shirt yesterday.

(7) is true even if Mary also bought a pair of shoes besides a hat and a shirt. So informational focus does not need to fulfill the requirements of exhaustiveness and exclusiveness but contrastive focus does.

1.2 Contrastive Focus in Chinese

1.2.1 Unmarked Contrastive Focus

Contrastive focus can be further divided into two types: marked vs. unmarked. Whether it is marked or unmarked depends on whether a special syntactic construction is being used. (8) is an example of unmarked contrastive focus in Chinese.

(8) Q: ni chi mifan ma?
 You eat rice QP
 ‘Do you eat rice?’

A: wo chi miantiao, bu chi mifan.
 I eat noodle not eat rice.
 ‘I eat noodle, not rice.’

In the answer in (8), *miantiao* is a new entity contrasting with *mifan* and rejects the alternative *mifan* as a possible value to make the truth value of the proposition ‘I eat X’ positive. As an unmarked form, it does not use any special syntactic pattern but obtains the interpretation through context. Given appropriate context, any constituent in an unmarked sentence can be interpreted as contrastive focus.

1.2.2 Marked Contrastive Focus

Contrastive focus can also take a marked form using special syntactic constructions. English cleft sentence like (9) which are mentioned above, are an example of marked construction for contrastive focus.

(9) It was last year that I went to Boston to visit my sister.

In (9), *last year* is under contrastive focus, forming a contrast with all the other possibilities available in the context. The sentence implies that *last year* is the one and only time that ‘I’ went to Boston to visit ‘my’ sister in the specific context where the utterance occurs, which satisfies the exhaustiveness and exclusiveness requirements for contrastive focus.

In Chinese, there are also constructions that resemble English cleft sentences. There are two of them: one marked by *shi*, and the other by *shi...de*. They are called Chinese Cleft Sentences. *Shi* is typically the copula and *de* is typically the attributive marker in Mandarin. What the exact functions of *shi* and *de* are in these two types of cleft constructions has not received a consensus in previous studies. (10) and (11) are examples of the two types respectively.

(10) wo shi mingnian qu faguo.
 I SHI next year go France.
 'It is next year that I am going to France.'

(11) wo shi zuotian qu kan wo jiejie de.
 I SHI yesterday go see my sister DE
 'It was yesterday that I went to see my sister.'

(10) and (11) have similar interpretations to their English counterparts. In the two sentences, the part under focus occurs after *shi*. So structurally they look similar too. For these reasons, they are called Chinese cleft sentences and their pragmatic function is likewise claimed to be the same as their English counterparts, namely, to indicate that the element after *shi* bears contrastive focus. *Shi* is accordingly called the focus marker in many studies.

A natural follow-up question is that: Which exact cleft sentence out of these two is the authentic construction for contrast focus in Mandarin, the *shi* cleft or the *shi...de* cleft, or both? Another follow-up question is that: if only one of them truly has the function marking contrastive focus, what is the main function of the other one? No consensus, however, has been reached in the literature regarding these two questions. For example, Xu (2002) claims that the *shi* cleft is used for marking contrastive focus. Teng (1979) says it is the *shi...de* cleft that marks contrastive focus, yet at the same time, he also says *de* is optional, so basically he does not distinguish these two cleft sentences. Some other studies like Lü (1982) think both constructions serve that function. What I am going to show in the following is that only the *shi* cleft is truly a marked construction for contrastive focus in Mandarin and the *shi...de* cleft, however similar to the *shi* cleft on the surface, is not used to mark contrastive focus but has a different semantic function.

2. Marked Construction For Contrastive Focus: *shi...de* Cleft or *shi* Cleft

2.1 The *shi...de* Cleft

Let us look at more examples of the *shi...de* cleft sentences. In (12), the subject is under focus, in (13), the locative adverbial is under focus and in (14) it is the manner adverbial that is under focus.

(12) shi ta gaosu wo de.
 SHI he tell me DE
 'It was him who told me (this).'

(13) wo shi zai daxue li renshi ta de.
 I SHI at university inside know him DE.
 'It was in college that I met him.'

(14) wo shi zuo gonggongqiche lai xuexiao de.
 I SHI sit bus come school DE
 'It was by bus that I came to school.'

Sentences from (12) to (14) are the most typical examples of the *shi...de* cleft sentences, which are generally used to focus subject, adverbials of time, place, manner, purpose and so on. All these elements occur in front of the verb in Mandarin. As a matter of fact, *shi...de* can only focus on a pre-verbal constituent. It cannot be used to focus the object or some other post-verbal elements. This is shown below in (15) and (16).

(15) *wo zuotian qu kan shi wo jiejie de.
 I yesterday go see SHI my sister DE.
 '(intended) It was my sister that I went to see yesterday.'

(16) *wo qu guo faguo shi yi ci de.
 I go ASP France SHI one time DE
 '(intended) It was once that I have been to France.'

The closest way of expressing the meaning intended by (15) is using the so-called 'pseudo cleft-sentence' as in (17) below in which *shi* must be interpreted as the copula.

(17) wo zuotian qu kan de shi wo jiejie.
 I yesterday go see DE SHI my sister
 'The person I went to see yesterday was my sister.'

As for the meaning intended by (16), there is simply no way of using the *shi...de* pattern at all. If we use the pseudo cleft again, we can only come up with some sentence as awkward as 'the number of times that I have been to France is one.' Certainly, an unmarked sentence can be resorted to to convey the sense of contrast as shown in (18) where the adverb *zhi* 'only' is used before the verb and stress is put on the word *yi ci* at the same time.

- (18) wo zhi qu guo faguo YI CI
 I only go ASP France one time.
 'I have only been to France ONCE.'

This prohibition from focusing post-verbal elements is a bit strange and hard to explain if we take the views that *shi* is just the focus marker and the function of the structure is to signal contrastive focus. There is no reason why post-verbal constituents cannot be focused. English cleft construction cannot focus on the verbal or adjectival predicate but this can be easily accounted for from the structure of the construction. The English cleft sentence contains a relative clause marked by *that* or *who* and the focused element is the antecedent. Just as an English relative clause cannot modify a verb or an adjective, the English cleft sentence cannot focus on the verb or adjective. But other than this restriction due to structural reasons, all other sentential constituents can be focused in English cleft sentences.

A second peculiarity of the *shi...de* construction is that it can only be used to describe a past event ((12) - (14) above) and a general situation as (19). Describing a future event using the *shi...de* cleft is in general forbidden as shown by (20).

- (19) taiyang shi cong dongfang shengqi de.
 Sun SHI from oriental rise DE
 'It is from the orient that the sun rises.'

- (20) *ta shi mingtian likai Beijing de.
 He SHI tomorrow leave Beijing DE
 '(intended) It is tomorrow that he will leave Beijing.'

The ungrammaticality of (20) would be very puzzling if the function of the *shi...de* pattern were indeed to mark contrastive focus, as it is hard to make a direct connection between the information structuring of focus and a particular semantic reference of time.

A third puzzling aspect regarding the claim that the main function of the *shi...de* cleft is to signal contrastive focus concerns its actual use in the discourse. If we claim that some construction's main function is to signal contrastive focus, then it would be natural to expect this construction to only be utilized where a contrast between two entities is intended to be presented, often serving such pragmatic purposes as refuting an existing assumption, or correcting someone's speech, etc. However, in Chinese *shi...de* is a commonly used sentence pattern, and even used in situations where nothing contrastive is intended. It goes so far that in forming an ordinary *wh*-question asking about a specific aspect (like time, location, manner, agent, etc.) of a past event, the *shi...de* construction is the only device. That is to say, if we treat sentences such as (12) –(14) above (repeated here in (21) with their corresponding questions added) as answers to three *wh*-questions

respectively, there is no way of asking and answering the questions other than using the *shi...de* construction.

- (21) a. Q: shi shei gaoxu ni de?
 SHI who tell you DE
 ‘Who told you (that)?’
 A: Shi ta gaosu wo de.
 SHI he tell me DE
 ‘He told me (that).’
- b. Q: ni shi zai nar renshi ta de?
 you SHI at where know him DE
 ‘Where did you meet him?’
 A: wo shi zai daxue li renshi ta de.
 I SHI at college inside know him DE
 ‘I met him in college.’
- c. Q: ni (shi) zenme lai xuexiao de?
 you SHI how come school DE
 ‘How did you come to school?’
 A: wo (shi) zuo gonggongqiche lai xuexiao de.
 I SHI sit bus come school DE
 ‘I came to school by bus.’

It is true that in a *wh*-question, the *wh*-phrase is the focus and the rest of the sentence is presupposition, but nothing contrastive is really meant here. There is no explanation why a construction for contrastive focus must be used in these cases. Or there should at least simultaneously exist a ‘noncontrastive’ way of asking and answering these questions in the language, but unfortunately there is not.

To summarize, due to the three observations described above, I conclude that *shi...de* is not truly a construction for contrastive focus in Mandarin Chinese. Next I will examine the other cleft structure in Mandarin and see if its main function is to mark contrastive focus.

2.2. The *shi* Cleft

Let us look at the other cleft construction in Mandarin, the *shi* cleft. It differs from the *shi...de* cleft in the surface structure by only one word, and its interpretation is also very similar to *shi...de*. One generally cannot tell their semantic difference. I repeat (10)

and (11) here ((22) and (23) below) to remind readers of the similar meanings they convey.

(22) wo shi mingnian qu faguo.
 I SHI next year go France.
 ‘It is next year that I am going to France.’

(23) wo shi zuotian qu kan wo jiejie de.
 I SHI yesterday go see my sister DE
 ‘It was yesterday that I went to see my sister.’

Despite all the apparent similarities between the *shi...de* cleft and the *shi* cleft, however, after scrutiny we find that the latter lacks all the unexplainable peculiarities of the *shi...de* construction discussed in last section that should not be expected for a construction for contrastive focus.

First, it can be used to focus on any constituent in the sentence, not just preverbal elements. It can focus on the subject (24a)), the preverbal temporal adverbial (24b)), the main verb (24c)), the object (25d)), and the post-verbal frequency complement (24e)).

- (24) a. Shi Zhangsan qu faguo, (bu shi Lisi).
 SHI Zhangsan go France not SHI Lisi.
 ‘It is Zhangsan who is going to France, (not Lisi).’
- b. Zhangsan shi mingnian qu faguo, (bu shi jinnian).
 Zhangsan SHI next-year go France not SHI this-year
 ‘It is next year that Zhangsan is going to France, (not this year).’
- c. Zhangsan shi qu faguo, (bu shi hui faguo).
 Zhangsan SHI go France, not SHI return France
 ‘Zhangsan is going to France, (not returning to France).’
- d. Zhangsan shi qu faguo, (bu shi qu yingguo).
 Zhangsan SHI go France, not SHI go Britain
 ‘It is France that Zhangsan is going to, (not Britain).’
- e. Zhangsan shi qu guo faguo liang ci, (bu shi san ci).
 Zhangsan SHI go ASP France two time not SHI three time
 ‘It is twice that Zhangsan has been to France, (not three times).’

It should be noted that as you can see from above, when a pre-verbal element as well as the main verb is under focus, *shi* is preverbal, but when a post-verbal element is under focus, *shi* still occurs in front of the main verb, not following the focused element moving rightward. This consistent preverbal position of *shi* will be accounted for later.

The question now is that when *shi* occurs before the verb and the focused element occurs after the verb, how do people know which post-verbal element is under focus? Here is where prosody comes into play. A sentence stress will be put on the word that is under contrastive focus. For instance, (24e) has two post-verbal constituents: the object *faguo* and the frequency complement *liang ci*. Which word is interpreted as the locus of contrastive focus depends on where the stress falls. In (25a), the stress is on *faguo* and *faguo* is understood to be the contrastive focus whereas in (25b) the stress is on *liang ci* and *liang ci* is accordingly understood to be the contrastive focus. This solution is not available to the *shi...de* cleft.

- (25) a. Zhangsan shi qu guo FAGUO liang ci.
 'It is France that Zhangsan has been to twice.'
- b. Zhangsan shi qu guo faguo LIANG CI.
 'It is twice that Zhangsan has been to France.'

The second difference between the *shi* cleft and the *shi...de* cleft is that the use of the *shi* cleft is not restricted to past or general situations, but to all temporal situations. (24b) above is an example of a future situation, and (26) and (27) below are its counterparts for past and general situations respectively.

- (26) Zhangsan shi san nian qian qu le faguo, (bu shi si nian qian).
 Zhangsan SHI three year ago go ASP France not SHI four year ago
 'It was three years ago that Zhangsan went to France, (not four years ago).'
- (27) Zhangsan shi jingchang qu faguo, (bu shi ou'er).
 Zhangsan SHI often go France not SHI occasionally
 'Zhangsan OFTEN goes to France, (OCCASIONALLY).'

Third, compared to the use of the *shi...de* construction in non-contrastive contexts, the use of *shi* cleft is heavily context-dependent and only used when a pragmatic contrastive focus is intended, as it should be. Therefore sometimes when taken out of context, a *shi* cleft sentence is hardly acceptable, shown in (28).

- (28) ? ta shi cizhi le.
 He SHI resign ASP

However, provided with an appropriate context, this sentence is rendered acceptable immediately.

- (29) ta shi cizhi le, bu shi bei jiegu le.
 He SHI resign ASP not SHI PAS fire ASP
 ‘He RESIGNED, not got FIRED.’

From its behaviors, I conclude that the main function of the *shi* cleft is to mark contrastive focus and it is truly a marked construction for contrastive focus in Mandarin Chinese. Therefore, although the *shi* cleft and the *shi...de* cleft constructions look similar and have similar interpretations, they have different pragmatic functions and only the *shi* cleft is used to mark contrastive focus in Mandarin Chinese.

3. Structures of the *shi* and the *shi...de* Cleft Constructions

Now that we have denied the possibility of the *shi...de* cleft being a construction marking contrastive focus in Mandarin and demonstrated that the *shi* cleft is the one marking contrastive focus, then what is the structure of the *shi* cleft, is *shi* a pure focus marker or something else? To understand its structure, we should start from investigating the structure of the *shi...de* cleft and from there the structure of the *shi* cleft will easily be accounted for.

3.1 Structure of the *shi...de* Cleft Construction

In order to understand the structure of the *shi* cleft, we need to understand what *shi* and *de* are in the construction. So what are they?

The main function of *de* in Mandarin is being the attributive marker. A phrase ending in *de* is often used as a modifier for a noun in Mandarin. The phrase preceding *de* can be a DP, VP, or a clause, as in the following examples.

- (30) a. Zhangsan de shu
 Zhangsan DE shu
 ‘Zhangsan’s book’
- b. na ge dai yanjing de xuesheng
 that CLF wear glasses DE student
 ‘the student who wears glasses’
- c. wo xihuan kan de dianying
 I like look DE movie
 ‘movies that I like to watch’

An interesting characteristic of such structure is that when the context is clear, the head nouns in all these phrases can be dropped, producing the so-called ‘headless relative clauses’, a covering term for all the *de* phrases in the following examples:

- (31) a. Na ben shu shi Zhangsan de.
 that CLF book be Zhangsan DE
 ‘That book is Zhangsan’s.’
- b. wo bu renshi na ge dai yanjing de.
 I not know that CLF wear glasses DE
 ‘I don’t know the one who is wearing glasses.’
- c. Zhaxie dou bu shi wo xihuan kan de.
 These all not be I like look DE
 ‘None of these is what I like to watch.’

But note that the allowance for dropping the head noun is only restricted to cases where the head noun functions as either the subject or the object in the relative clause. A sentence like (32) where the head noun is *yuanyin* ‘reason’ and dropped is ungrammatical because *yuanyin* functions as the adverbial in the relative clause.

- (32) qing gaosu wo ni mei lai shangke de *(yuanyin).
 Please tell me you not come have-class DE (reason).
 ‘Please tell me the reason why you didn’t come to class.’

Because dropping of the head noun after *de* in this type of structures is very common, some DPs that contain a VP followed by *de* alone have even been lexicalized in Mandarin, referring to a person in a particular profession such as *mai cai de* ‘selling vegetables *de*’ (meaning vegetable vendor), *zuo shengyi de* ‘do business *de*’ (meaning businessman), *changge de* ‘sing song *de*’ (meaning singer) and etc.

- (33) Zhangsan shi mai cai de/zuo shengyi de/changge de.
 Zhangsan be sell vegetable DE/do business DE/sing-song DE
 ‘Zhangsan is a vegetable vendor/businessman/singer.’

In (33), *shi* must be analyzed as the copula. It makes good sense semantically and *shi* can be negated and also changes into V-not-V to form a yes-no question. (33) is just a simple structure of ‘A is B’. Can we analyze the *shi...de* construction in the same way? Is there evidence for the analysis of *de* in *shi...de* as the attributive marker, *shi* as the copula and the whole sentence as a structure of ‘A is B’ just like (33)? I think there is.

As for *shi* in the cleft construction, it must be a verb at least. First it can be negated, the negative form of *shi...de* is *bu shi...de* (shown in (34)). Also in forming a V-not-V question, *shi bu shi* is used ((35)).

(34) Zhangsan bu shi qunian qu faguo de.
 Zhangsan not SHI last-year go France DE.
 ‘It was not last year that Zhangsan went to France.’

(35) Zhangsan shi bu shi qunian qu faguo de?
 Zhangsan SHI not SHI last-year go France DE.
 ‘Was it last year that Zhangsan went to France?’

If we admit that *shi* is a verb, then it must be the copula. Next, if we would analyze *de* as the attributive marker, the verb phrase before it and after *shi* must be analyzed as a relative clause. There are two pieces of evidences to support this analysis.

First, we all know that the *shi...de* construction can focus a subject DP, exemplified again as below.

(36) shi Zhangsan shuo de.
 SHI Zhangsan say DE
 ‘It was Zhangsan who said (this).’

However, the following sentences are ungrammatical regardless of their almost identical structure to (36).

(37) a. *shi Zhangsan cizhi de.
 SHI Zhangsan resign DE
 ‘(intended) It was Zhangsan who resigned.’

b. *shi ta zai xiao de.
 SHI he at laugh DE
 ‘(intended) It is him who is laughing.’

(37) cannot be acceptable no matter what the contexts might be. The only difference between (36) and (37) that can be detected after further scrutiny is that *shuo* is a transitive verb whereas *cizhi* and *xiao* are intransitive verbs. First if *shi...de* were really a construction marking contrastive focus, the interaction between verb transitivity and focusability of the subject would be another strange property to account for. So why the contrast in grammaticality between (36) and (37)? If we analyze the segments between *shi* and *de* as relative clauses in the above sentences, then we have the answer. This is because an intransitive verb cannot form a legitimate relative clause when the head noun is dropped. As I mentioned before, the head noun of a relative clause can only be dropped in Mandarin when it functions as the subject or object in the relative clause, i.e. it must be a missing argument of the verb in the relative clause. Therefore when the relative clause contains a subject and an intransitive verb, its argument structure is complete and thus

cannot be used to modify another noun. This is the reason why (37) is ruled out. As a contrast, in (36), the part between *shi* and *de* ‘*Zhangsan shuo*’ still needs an object, and hence a well-formed relative clause. This is the reason why (36) is grammatical. I propose (38) below as the underlying structure for (36).

(38)(DPi) *shi* *Zhangsan* *shuo* *de* (DPi).
 SHI *Zhangsan* say DE
 ‘(literally) (Sth.) was what Zhangsan said.

I assume that in (38) both the subject and the head noun of the relative clause are covert and they are coindexed. It is again a simple structure ‘A is B’ just like (33). In Mandarin it is very natural to drop the subject/topic of a sentence. It will be a complete sentence if we fill out the subject position with an overt DP, say, *zhe jian shi* ‘this thing’. Some people may raise a question here: if you assume that there is a DP after *de* which is coindexed with the subject, what exact DP can we reconstruct here? Is it *Shi* ‘thing’, *yi jian shi* ‘a thing’, or *zhe jian shi* ‘this thing’? It is true that any of such overt DPs would make the sentence in (38) sound odd. But this fact should not invalidate the analysis. Nobody will deny that in a sentence like *ta shi changge de* ‘He is a singer’ (c.f. (33)), *changge de* refers to a person who sings, yet an overt noun phrase like *ren* ‘person’, *yi ge ren* ‘a person’ or *na ge ren* ‘that person’ would all make the sentence sound more or less odd. I propose that in the *shi...de* cleft construction, there is a base-generated covert nominal category after *de* which is the head of the relative clause after *shi* and it is coindexed with the DP before *shi*. So the underlying structure of, say (13) above, is shown below in (39).

(39) [_{wo_i} *shi* [[*zai* *daxue* *li* *renshi* *ta* *de*_{CP}] *e_i* DP] IP]
 I SHI at university inside know him DE.
 ‘It was in college that I met him.’

To summarize, only when we analyze *shi* as the copula and *de* as the attributive marker followed by an empty head noun, can we account for the contrast of grammaticality between (36) and (37).

Another piece of evidence supporting the relative clause analysis in the *shi...de* construction is related to the use of the completion *le*. It is known that when using *shi...de* to describe a past action, for which the completion *le* is normally used, one cannot use *le*. Again, this would be strange for a construction whose main function is to mark contrastive focus. However, it happens that when a relative clause is describing a past action, *le* is not used either, as shown below.

- (40) *zuotian gei wo da (*le) dianhua de ne ge ren shi wo mama.*
 yesterday to me make phone-call DE that CLF person is my mom
 ‘The person who called me yesterday was my mom.’

This coincidence would be hard to explain if we consider the *shi...de* cleft and relative clauses as two irrelevant structures to each other. But if we assume that the *shi...de* cleft construction contains in it a relative clause, then it is not a coincidence anymore.

Based on the above analysis, I conclude that in the *shi...de* cleft construction *shi* is the copula, *de* is the attributive marker, and the entire construction, regardless of its function, is a simple structure of direct equation ‘A is B’, where A is a DP and B is a headless relative clause. This analysis also readily explains why *shi* never occurs right of the verb. That is just a sure result of the structure of *shi...de*. A *shi...de* sentence with *shi* occurring after the verb in the relative clause is simply a badly-formed structure in Chinese, as shown in (41) ((15) above).

- (41)* *wo zuotian qu kan shi wo jiejie de.*
 I yesterday go see SHI my sister DE.
 ‘(intended) It was my sister that I went to see yesterday.’

3.2 Structure of the *shi* Cleft Construction

Along the same line of the analysis for the *shi...de* cleft, I propose that *shi* in the *shi* cleft is also the copula for the same reasons that it can be negated with *bu*, forms V-not-V question, and it also cannot occur right of the verb. So on the surface it is also a structure of equation ‘A is B’. However without the attributive marker *de*, it is an equation between a DP (A) and a VP or sentence (B). How does this work?

Following Ross (1983), I think that the VP or S after *shi* can be regarded as a nominal element, which describes a situation. This can well be so because there is no formal marking for verbal or sentential nominalization in Chinese. Thus the entire sentence of the *shi* cleft construction can have such interpretation as ‘for somebody or something, the situation/case is (what is described by the VP or S)’. So (42a) ((24a) above) is interpreted as ‘The situation is that ZHANGSAN is going to France’, and (42b) ((24b) above) is interpreted as ‘For Zhangsan, the situation is that he is going to France NEXT YEAR’.

- (42) a. *Shi Zhangsan qu faguo, (bu shi Lisi).*
 SHI Zhangsan go France not SHI Lisi.
 ‘It is Zhangsan who goes to France, (not Lisi).’
 b. *Zhangsan shi mingnian qu faguo, (bu shi jinnian).*
 Zhangsan SHI next-year go France not SHI this-year
 ‘It is next year that Zhangsan is going to France, (not this year).’

This kind of analysis is in line with the basic topic-comment structure of Mandarin Chinese. As one prominent characteristic of topic-comment structure, topic does not have to be in a direct selectional relationship with the predicate. The overt DP before *shi* in each of the above examples is to be analyzed as the topic. The real subject is an empty element right before *shi* standing for word ‘the situation’ ‘the case’ or the expletive ‘it’ (Chinese does not have overt expletives by the way), which results in the surface form where the initial overt DP (the topic) forms an indirect equational relationship with the predicate. Li (2005) proposes a TopP containing an IP as the basic structure for Chinese sentences. Following Li (2005), the underlying structure of (42b) above is as follows.

- (43) [Zhangsan_i [e *shi* [e_i mingnian qu faguo_{CP}].IP] TopP]
 ‘It is next year that Zhangsan is going to France.’

To sum up, both *shi...de* and *shi* cleft constructions are actually simple equational sentences ‘A is B’, with *shi* being the copula. The difference is that in the former, A and B form a direct equational relationship and in the latter, A and B form an indirect equational relationship with the sentence interpreted as ‘For A, the situation/case is that B.’ This semantic interpretation actually matches very well with its pragmatic function as marking contrastive focus, because when people are making contrast between two entities, they tend to say ‘For X, it is a case of A, not a case of B.’

4. Recapitulations and Remaining Questions

In this paper I discussed two cleft constructions in Mandarin Chinese: *shi...de* and *shi*. Both have been claimed to be constructions marking contrastive focus. I have shown that only the *shi* cleft is truly a marked structure in Mandarin to signal contrastive focus, while the *shi...de* cleft construction, regardless of its apparent resemblance to the *shi* cleft, is not for marking contrastive focus. Then I analyzed the structures of both constructions and concluded that *shi* in both constructions is the copula and *de* in the *shi...de* cleft is still the attributive marker. Both constructions have the structure of ‘A is B’, only that in *shi...de* A and B has a direct equational relationship, whereas in *shi*, A is the topic, and A and B form an indirect equational relationship.

There are still some remaining issues. If the main function of *shi...de* is not to mark contrastive focus, what is its main function? Why does it have to be used in a wh-question about a past event? Why can it be used to describe a past or general situation but not future? How are these characteristics related to its structure? Since this paper is only concerned with constructions for contrastive focus in Mandarin, investigations of those questions are beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, since *shi...de* pattern has a lot of varieties with different semantic properties in Mandarin, it can certainly form a topic itself for a whole new independent study. As a matter of fact, there have been a lot of studies on that topic in the past, but certainly further research is still needed.\

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