

On the Derivation of Mandarin A-not-A and Alternative Questions

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The current paper aims to develop a derivational analysis for Mandarin A-not-A and alternative questions that is capable of capturing their syntactic peculiarities. A-not-A questions refer to a type of question functionally similar to yes/no questions but involve two copies of a predicate with one copy negated, as exemplified in (1) below. Another type of question that is superficially and semantically comparable to A-not-A questions is the alternative questions, which also contain a positive predicate and its negated counterpart, but characteristically with the disjunctive coordinator *haishi* ‘or’ linking the two, as shown in (2).

- (1) *Yuehan xihuan bu xihuan zheben shu?* [A-not-A question]
John like not like this book
‘Does John like or not like this book?’
- (2) *Yuehan xihuan haishi bu xihuan zheben shu?* [Alternative question]
John like or not like this book
‘Does John like or not like this book?’

Despite their apparent similarities, A-not-A questions actually differ from alternative questions vis-à-vis a number of syntactic behaviors. For instance, C.-T. Huang (2010a) notes that only A-not-A predicates, but not *haishi*-predicates, induce island effects, as demonstrated in the following examples where they function as the sentential subject:

- (3) a. * [*wo qu bu qu Meiguo*] *bijiao hao?* [A-not-A predicate]
I go not go America more good
‘Is it better that I go to America or that I don’t?’
- b. [*wo qu haishi bu qu Meiguo*] *bijiao hao?* [*haishi*-predicate]
I go or not go America more good
‘Is it better that I go to America or that I don’t?’

In addition, parallel to the Cantonese examples in Law 2001, even though quantificational DPs (QPs) can occur as object in A-not-A questions, they are banned from occupying the subject position, as contrasted in (4a) and (4b) below. On the contrary, as can be seen in (5), QPs can occur in both subject and object positions in alternative questions without altering grammaticality.

- (4) a. *ta renshi bu renshi henduo xuesheng?* [QP as object]
he know not know many student
‘Does he know or not know many students?’
- b. * *henduo xuesheng dou renshi bu renshi ta?* [QP as subject]
many student all know not know him
‘Do many students know or not know him?’

- (5) a. *ta renshi haishi bu renshi henduo xuesheng?* [QP as object]
 he know or not know many student
 'Does he know or not know many students?'
- b. *henduo xuesheng dou renshi haishi bu renshi ta?* [QP as subject]
 many student all know or not know him
 'Do many students know or not know him?'

In this paper, I argue that both the island effects and the prohibition of QPs as subjects in A-not-A questions can be traced to the nature of A-not-A predicates as an operator, which have to move to [Spec, CP] position to take the question scope. Island effects in (3a) result from this obligatory LF movement because in this case the movement causes violation of the Empty Category Principle (Chomsky, 1981). Also, as noted by Law (2001), since QPs in the subject position necessarily intervene between the A-not-A operator and its final [Spec, CP] destination, the chain formation for the operator and its trace is blocked due to violation of Relativized Minimality (Rizzi, 1990). QPs are therefore barred from the subject position in A-not-A questions.

On the other hand, following R.-h. Huang (2010b), I argue that *haishi*-predicates in alternative questions are variables that can be licensed in situ via binding with the Q-operator at [Spec, CP], as opposed to being operators, which must move to [Spec, CP]. Constructions with *haishi*-predicates are therefore immune to island effects and the ban on QP subjects because no LF movements are required in the first place.

My proposal also diverges from C.-T. Huang's (2010a) in that I take both A-not-A and alternative questions to be derived from essentially the same bi-clausal underlying structures via Conjunction Reduction or PF ellipsis. I argue that my proposal is superior because it can account for certain syntactic properties associated with A-not-A questions without additional assumptions.

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