Chapter One

Introduction

In Chomsky (1981), the relationship between a reflexive and its antecedent is characterized by a locality condition and a syntactic prominence condition. Locality is defined in terms of governing category (GC), and syntactic prominence is defined by the notion of c-command (cf. Baker 1995; Pan 1998). In his study of Chinese compound reflexives, Pan (1998) finds that Chinese has a different definition of prominence for its reflexives, and that locality is, in fact, a relative rather than absolute condition in Chinese. He shows quite convincingly that Chinese employs the animacy hierarchy rather than c-command in defining its prominence condition, and that locality should be regulated by a closeness condition in Chinese. Xu (1999) emphasizes the importance of the interaction between prominence and locality in the interpretation of reflexives. He claims that prominence means dependability and locality means availability, and that different languages may have different definitions of prominence and locality. Bresnan (2001) also discusses the interaction between prominence and locality, and claims that their interaction may derive different possibilities in pronominal binding.

Inspired by these ideas on prominence and locality, this work explores the roles that prominence and locality play in grammar. The basic idea is that prominence and locality will interact to determine the derivation and interpretation of language. Assume that there are two general principles, as shown below, at work in the grammatical system:
(1) The Principle of Prominence

The more prominent one is preferred to the less prominent one in syntactic derivation and interpretation.

(2) The Principle of Locality

The closer one is preferred to the less close one in syntactic derivation and interpretation.

The above two principles are very simple since they are just two general principles. The actual cases involved, however, would be quite complicated. Suppose that what is prominent is less close, and what is closer is less prominent. All this will result in linguistic variation. If viewed cross-linguistically, things will be made even more complicated since different languages may have different definitions of prominence, though they may have the same definition of locality if locality is viewed in terms of closeness (cf. Pan 1998). That is to say, what is prominent in one language may not be prominent in another language. If this is true, it will be of great significance if it can be proved that part of the differences among languages can be reduced to the parameterization of the notion of prominence.

The goal of this work is to explore how the interaction between prominence and locality can account for some basic constraints that underlie linguistic interpretation. Specifically, it investigates how the interpretation of wh-questions and reflexives is determined by the interaction between prominence and locality. It shows that in multiple wh-questions, locality is used to guarantee the priority of the prominent wh-word in wh-movement so as to derive the pair-list reading, whereas
in reflexive binding, the binding domain for reflexives is defined by the notion of prominence.

This dissertation contains two parts. The first part studies the syntax and semantics of wh-questions. It shows that, although Chinese and English employ different strategies to type a wh-question, the interpretation of wh-expressions is basically constrained by the same set of conditions. It is observed that in multiple wh-questions, a more prominent wh-word prefers to precede a less prominent one since in multiple wh-questions, wh-words prefer to be interpreted in the pair-list reading, which can be derived only by the prominent wh-word that functions as a set generator. This work makes a distinction between the clausal typing condition and the wh-interpretation condition, and argues that wh-questions must be properly typed according to the following condition:

\begin{itemize}
  \item [(3)] The Pure Clausal Typing Condition (PCTC)
  \begin{itemize}
    \item [a.] For wh-raising languages, a clause is typed as a wh-question iff there is a wh-word that moves overtly into [Spec, CP] via cyclic movement without crossing any strong island.
    \item [b.] For Q-particle languages, a clause is typed as a wh-question iff there is a wh-word interpreted with the closest C[+Q] via either the Agree operation or the choice function application.
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

Besides being typed, a wh-question also needs to be properly interpreted. The dissertation shows that wh-interpretation is constrained by the principle of economy, which stipulates that wh-interpretation in syntax is preferred to wh-interpretation in semantics (cf. Reuland 2001 for similar ideas in accounting for anaphoric binding).
It points out that the principle of economy is, in fact, used by the grammatical system to help place the more prominent wh-word before the less prominent one in multiple wh-questions so as to properly derive the pair-list reading. The reason why in (4) the wh-object cannot move across the wh-subject in syntactic derivation is because the wh-object is less prominent than the wh-subject and thus cannot derive the pair-list reading for the wh-subject.

(4) *What did who buy?
(5) ?Which book did how many people buy?

(Comorovski 1996: 85)

However, if the relevant wh-object is an inherently D-linked which-phrase, it can move across the wh-subject, as shown in (5), because a D-linked which-phrase is prominent in discourse, and can thus derive the pair-list reading for the wh-subject that it c-commands.

The dissertation also discusses the A-not-A question, and the asymmetry between weishenme ‘why’ and other wh-expressions in Chinese. Following the analysis proposed in Huang (1991) and Shi (1994), the dissertation assumes that the A-not-A element is formed by the incorporation of the Q operator into the INFL, and argues that when the A-not-A element occurs in a strong island, the sentence is ungrammatical because the pure clausal typing condition (PCTC) would be violated if the A-not-A element is associated with the matrix Q operator. The dissertation claims that when a wh-element occurs in a strong island, it cannot move out of it in either overt syntax or LF, and argues that weishenme cannot take matrix scope in strong islands because it cannot range over an individuated set, and
thus fails to be interpreted via the choice function application, given that wh-expressions occurring in an island cannot be interpreted via the Agree operation introduced in the dissertation. As a result, *weishenme* has no interpretation when it occurs in a strong island. The dissertation also discusses wh-island effects in English and Chinese, and unlike previous claims made in the literature, it argues that the so-called English wh-island effects are also observed in Chinese. The dissertation employs PCTC and the principle of economy (PE) to explain why wh-island effects are observed in natural language. With the help of the four criteria for distinguishing echo questions from original questions, the dissertation argues that the reason why one may have the impression that the wh-island effects are not observed in Chinese is because echo questions are often wrongly taken for original questions, given that the distinction between the echo question and the original question is not reflected in word order in Chinese (cf. Xu 1990; Liu 1986).

The second part of the dissertation shows how the interaction between prominence and locality can account for the binding properties of reflexives in Chinese. On the basis of an assumption held in Huang and Tang (1991), the dissertation derives the long distance (LD) binding properties of *ziji* from its lack of phi-features and referential features, and shows that *ziji* is constrained by the same binding condition that also applies to the compound reflexive in Chinese, which is given below:

(6) Reflexive Binding Condition (RBC)

a. A reflexive can be bound to an accessible prominent NP in its binding domain.

b. The binding domain of the reflexive is the minimal complete functional
complex (CFC) that contains all the members of the candidate set and the reflexive.

c. A binds B iff A is co-indexed with B, and A and B are compatible in phi-features.

d. A is accessible to B iff the assignment of the index of A to B would not violate *[γ…δ…], where γ and δ bear the same index.

The dissertation argues that the crucial concept accounting for the binding of reflexives in Chinese is prominence, and the binding domain for reflexives is actually determined by the notion of prominence. It uses the feature-searching engines, i.e., the R-engine (referential feature engine) and the P-engine (phi-feature engine), to search for the candidates and the most prominent NP(s) to define the binding domain of reflexives. Whenever the most prominent NP is found, the searching engine will stop its search and produce a candidate set. It is the candidate set that defines the binding domain of the reflexive. When the binding domain of the reflexive is defined, the reflexive cannot be bound to an antecedent outside of it. Following Huang and Tang (1991), the dissertation claims that the bare reflexive *ziji* is different from *ta-ziji* in that it lacks not only the referential feature, but also the phi-feature, and thus must depend on two feature-searching engines for defining the candidate set and the most prominent NP(s). Since there are two feature-searching engines for *ziji*, the binding domain of *ziji* is defined by the union of the sets determined by the two most prominent NPs selected by the two searching engines. The blocking effect for *ziji* is derived if *ziji* is bound outside of the binding domain defined above. This work claims that the binding domain defined by the candidate set related to the most prominent NP is similar to the
governing category. The governing category is also defined by the notion of prominence, i.e., the subject/SUBJECT.

To summarize, it can be seen from the above discussion that prominence and locality are the two important factors in the grammar of natural language, which are often interrelated and interact with each other. Their interaction can account for not only the interpretation of wh-questions, but also the interpretation of reflexives in Chinese and English.
Notes

1 Xu (p.c.) also points out that it is theoretically and empirically possible that what is constrained by a strict locality condition in one language may be free from it in another language, while what is free from the locality condition in one language may be strictly constrained by it in another language.