

The Syntactic Behavior of Wh-Words in Wh-Questions in *A Story of the Stone*

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Abstract

The syntactic behavior of wh-words in Wh-Questions in Mandarin Chinese has been well discussed in previous literature, particularly in Archaic Chinese and modern Chinese, but it is less discussed in early modern Chinese, especially in the classic novel of *A Story of the Stone*. Wh-Questions in *A Story of the Stone* may serve as representatives for the status of the sentence type in early modern Chinese, though there are thousands of them in the classic novel. The galley proof read Jiaxu version of *A Story of the Stone* commented by Zhi Yanzhai, is selected for data collection in this article. As there are thousands of Wh-Questions in the novel, chapter one is chosen for the source of data collection. In Chapter One, there are 21 Wh-Questions for us to analyze the syntactic behavior of these sentence structures. None of these interrogative sentences carry mood particles at the end of them which might lead us to the belief that question particles are not head complementizers in the Wh-Questions, instead they are sentential affixes attached to the head C at the end of the sentence. After the object shifted wh-words are moved to the spec FocP position to check against the strong focus feature of the head, the wh-feature of these wh-words is attracted to the spec CP at the front of the matrix clause to check off the weak head wh-feature of the complementizer. In relative clauses the wh-feature of these wh-words is attracted to the spec CP in the embedded clause to check off the weak head wh-feature of the complementizer. In most the Wh-Questions in Chapter One of *A Story of the Stone*, the wh-feature of the in situ wh-words is attracted to the spec CP at the front of the matrix clause to check off the weak head wh-feature of the complementizer, abiding by the Wh-Feature Attraction Principle.

Keywords

Wh-words, Wh-Questions, *A Story of the Stone*, Feature Checking, Feature Attraction

1. Introduction

The syntactic behavior of wh-words in Wh-Questions in Mandarin Chinese has been well investigated in previous literature. As the wh-words in Wh-Questions in Mandarin Chinese, unlike wh-movement in English, stay in situ, the hypotheses of LF move-movement is proposed [5-6]. However, Chinese belongs to the so-called null spec type of language based on the syntactic study of wh-typology [10, 16-18]. As in recent literature [18-19], it is argued that either unselective binding [30, 33-34] or LF-movement [5-6] fails to account for the syntactic behavior in the interpretation of Wh-Questions in the bamboo slips of *Tao Te Ching* [19-20]. Therefore, following Chomsky's feature attraction thesis [2-4],

Wh-feature Attraction Principle is put forward for the operation of feature checking in Wh-Questions [23-25] in order to bring the syntactic interpretation of in situ Chinese wh-words and raised wh-words in other types of languages into a reasonable and unified explanation.

The syntactic behavior of wh-words in Wh-Questions has been well researched in Archaic Chinese and modern Chinese [8-26, 30, 35]. However it is less discussed in early modern Chinese, especially in the classic novel of *A Story of the Stone* [1]. The present article thus deals with the syntactic study of wh-words in Wh-Questions in *A Story of the Stone* [1]. The proofread Jiaxu version of *A Story of the Stone* by Deng Suifu, written by Cao Xueqin and commented by Zhi Yanzhai is the earliest well kept and the most precious copy among the currently found 12 hand written copies of *A Story of the Stone*

commented by Zhi Yanzhai [1], and that's why in the present research he above mentioned copy is selected for data collection.

2. Methods

First, the selection of the most academic and authentic version of *A Story of the Stone*, also called *A Dream of the Red Mansions*, or *The Twelve Beauties of Chinling*. The galley proof read Jiaxu version of *A Story of the Stone* commented by Zhi Yanzhai, is considered as the one of the original versions by Cao Xueqin. Thus this version of *A Story of the Stone* is chosen for data collection.

Secondly, data collection. In *A Story of the Stone* there are thousands of Wh-Questions in the original 80 chapters written by Cao Xueqin. It is not accessible for us to analyze the whole bunch of Wh-Questions in the story. Therefore we choose chapter one as the source of data collection and finally 21 Wh-Questions are found in Chapter One, which may be the representatives of the other Wh-Questions in the book.

Finally, the syntactic behavior of the 21 Wh-Questions in the classic work is discussed based on the Wh-feature Attraction Principle [23-25].

3. Theory

Following Chomsky [2-4], who proposes that Move F should be the minimal syntactic operation in light of the Economy Principle, the universality of Wh-feature Attraction Principle [23-25] is thus verified.

(1) Move F [2: 262]

$K = \{\gamma, \{\alpha, \beta\}\}$, where α, β are features of the syntactic objects already formed.

(2) Economy Principle [2: 262]

F carried along just enough material for convergence.

(3) Wh-feature Attraction Principle [23-25]

The Wh-feature of a wh-word or a wh-phrase must be attracted to spec CP for wh-feature checking requirement.

In (3), the phrase "a wh-word or a wh-phrase" may be represented by "a wh-XP" instead. Therefore, (3) may be revised as (4) illustrated below.

(4) Wh-feature Attraction Principle

The Wh-feature of a wh-XP must be attracted to spec CP for wh-feature checking requirement.

In the following paragraphs the checking operation of the wh-features in the Wh-Questions in the early modern novel will be dealt with in detail.

4. Results

After the syntactic analysis of the 21 Wh-Questions in Chapter One of *A Story of the Stone*, it is found that the wh-words in the Wh-Questions follow the Wh-feature Attraction Principle rewritten as in (4) above. Most of the wh-words stay in situ and their wh-feature is moved to spec CP for feature checking requirement according to (4). The only 2 wh-words in (11) and (13) in Section 5 raised to the

front of the verb or preposition are attracted not by the [+wh] feature in head C but by the strong [+focus] feature of the focus phrase. The wh-feature of the head C in these focus phrases is also checked by [+wh] feature movement of the wh-words attracted by the weak [+wh] feature head C. Unlike the Wh-Questions in other chapters in the novel, these 21 Wh-Questions don't carry any mood particles at the end of the sentences, which also prove that mood particles are not possible to be complementizers [7, 13, 32] but they are actually sentence clitics adjoined to the head complementizer at the end of the sentences [20-25, 30]. This understanding may be further supported by the mood particles used as topic markers which also behave as affixes attached to the head Top of topic phrase at the end of the small clause [27-29].

5. Discussion

Wh-Questions are so numerous in *A Story of the Stone* that it is quite difficult for us to describe the syntactic behavior of all the wh-words as it is either not easy to count how many there are exactly in the novel. In fact it is estimated that there are thousands of Wh-Questions in it, because in chapter one there are 21 Wh-Questions and there are 80 chapters in the Jiaxu version of *A Story of the Stone* written by Cao Xueqin, commented by Zhi Yanzhai and proof read by Deng Suifu. However it is accessible to count exactly how many there are in chapter one and the syntactic behavior of these wh-words will be a mirror for the others in the novel. Altogether 21 Wh-Questions are found in the first chapter of the well-known classic work, among which the wh-words in 3 sentences are relativized as illustrated in (6-7) and (14), and the wh-words in 2 other sentences are raised to the front of the verb or preposition as shown in (11) and (13). Interestingly enough, none of these Wh-Questions carry any mood particles at the end of the sentences, although in other chapters the Wh-Questions do.

The 21 Wh-Questions are listed below.

(5) Ni dao ci shu cong he er lai?

You say this book from where Part. Come
"Where do you say this book comes from?"

(6) Bu zhi ci le dizi na ji jian qi chu?

No know favor Part disciple which few Cl. precious things
"I don't know which precious things I am favored?"

(7) You bu zhi xie le dizi dao he fang he chu?

Neither no know carry Part. disciple to which area which place

"I don't know either which place I was carried to?"

(8) Qian shei ji qu zuo qi chuan?

Request who record to write legendary tale
"Whom may I ask to record this legendary tale?"

(9) You you he nan?

Again have what difficulty
"Again what difficulty do you have?"

(10) Nali you gongfu qu kan na lizhi zhi shu

How have effort to read the governance Part. book

"How do they make efforts to read the books on

governance?”

(11) Wo shi yi wei he ru?

My master intend do what like

“What do you, my master, intend to do?”

(12) Shei jie qizhong wei?

Who understand its taste

“Who understands its mystery?”

(13) Ni xie le zhe chunwu, yi yu he wang?

You carry Part. the fool idea intend where go

“Where do you intend to carry this fool to?”

(14) Dan bu zhi luo yu he fang he chu?

But no know land in which area which place

“But I don’t know which place will land on?”

(15) Ni ba zhe youmingwuyun leijidieniang zhi wu bao zai huai li zuo shen?

You BA this unfortuante sorrowful Part. thing embrace in arms in do what

“What do you do to take this unfortunate sorrowful thing in your arms?”

(16) Shei kan yue xia chou?

Who bear moon under mate

“Who bears to mate under the moon?”

(17) He gan kuangdan zhi ci?

How dare wild to this

“How dare to be so wild?”

(18) Lao xiansheng he xing zhi ci?

Old sir what interest come here

“What interest brings you here, sir?”

(19) Xiong he bu zao yan?

Elder brother why not early say

“Why not say it earlier, elder brother?”

(20) Na you Yinglian de zongying?

Where have Part. sight

“Where is the sight of Yinglian?”

(21) Gu jin jiang xiang zai he fang?

Ancient modern general prime minister in which place

“Where are the ancient and modern generals and prime ministers?”

(22) Ni mankou shuo shenme?

You fullmouth say what

“What did you say?”

(23) Dai wo jiang ni zhe Haoliao Song jiezhu chulai ru he?

Wait me Part. you this Good-end Song interpret out like what

“How about waiting for me to interpret your Good-end Song?”

(24) Ru he liang bin you cheng shuang?

Like what two sideburn again turn frosted

“How do the two sideburns turn gray again?”

(25) Na tao yixin?

Where beg message

“Where to get any news?”

As it is shown in the above examples, most of the wh-words in the Wh-Questions stay in situ in early modern Chinese. Let us take sentence (5) as an example. In light of (4), the tree diagram of (5) may be demonstrated as in Figure 1 below, as “ni dao” is in a higher CP we leave this higher CP not drawn in

the tree diagram for convenience of analysis.

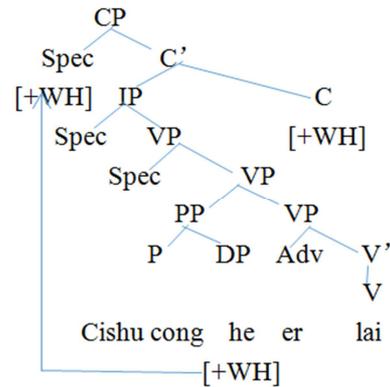


Figure 1. The tree diagram of sentence (5).

The arrow in the figure shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-word “he”.

As it is shown in the tree diagram of Figure 1, the wh-word “he” is originally generated in the DP position of the prepositional phrase “cong he”, and unlike its English counterpart as shown in (5), the wh-word “he” does not move to the spec CP position to check the [+wh] feature of the head C, as in Chinese language the head complementizer carries weak [+wh] feature which can only attract the [+wh] feature of the wh-word “he” to move to the spec CP position to check the weak [+wh] feature of the head C. Thus the sentence is interpreted as a wh-question and the derivation converges in accordance with the Economy Principle of (2). The weak [+wh] feature of the head C cannot attract the morphological feature of the wh-word “he” to pied pipe along with it to spec of CP position. As Chinese is a head C last language, the null head C is located at the end of the sentence as demonstrated in the tree diagram of Figure 1. If there is a mood particle “ne” at the end of the sentence in (5), the mood particle is a clitic at the sentence level attached to the null head C at the end of the sentence as illustrated in Figure 2.

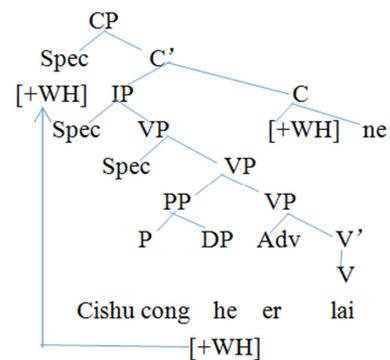


Figure 2. The adjoining process of the clitic “ne”.

a) The arrow in the figure shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-word “he”.

b) The mood particle “ne” is adjoined to the head C [+wh] feature.

In Figure 2, the mood particle “ne” at the end of Wh-Questions is adjoined as an affix to the head C at the end

of the sentence. The mood particle is not used as the head of the sentence, instead the null complementizer is located in the head C position of CP. This analysis of the mood particle “ne” is in accordance with the idea that phonological constituents are externalized after spellout in PF, as mood particles in Chinese are mainly used as phonological elements instead of syntactic semantic constituents because mood particles are lexically meaningless.

In the following paragraph we’ll mainly deal with the syntactic behavior of wh-words in relative clauses such as those in (6-7) and (14). In (6), the wh-word in relative clauses remains in situ as those in Wh-Questions in (5), (8-9) and others. The subject in the matrix clause is dropped, and the subject in the embedded clause is also null, as Chinese is a pro drop language. The two dropped subjects however both refer to the speaker. The tree diagram of (6) is illustrated in Figure 3 below. For convenience, the matrix clause is omitted in the tree.

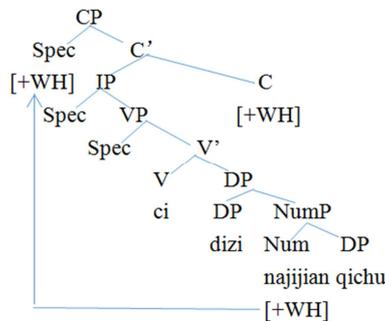


Figure 3. The tree diagram of sentence (6).

The arrow in the figure shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-phrase “najijian”.

In Figure 3 the wh-phrase “na ji jian qi chu” stays in situ, but its [+wh] feature moves to the spec of CP in the embedded clause for [+wh] feature checking and checks off the weak [+wh] feature of the head C in the embedded clause. Similarly in sentence (7), the wh-phrase “he fang he chu” stays unmoved, while the its [+wh] feature is raised to the spec of CP in the embedded clause for [+wh] feature checking. The weak [+wh] feature of the head C is checked against by the raised [+wh] feature of the wh-phrase and the derivation of the sentence converges as is shown in Figure 4. As is seen in the tree diagram, the matrix CP is not drawn in the tree for sake of convenience.

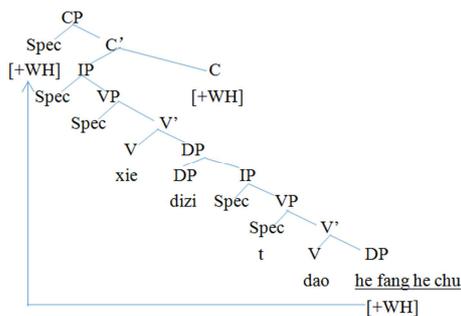


Figure 4. The tree diagram of sentence (7).

The arrow in the figure shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-phrase “he fang he chu”.

Sentence (7) is different from (6) in that within VP there is an IP used as complement of the VP. The subject of the infinitive IP “dizi” is base generated in spec VP in the infinitive clause and then raises to spec DP for accusative case checking as the infinitive verb “dao” is deprived of its ability to assign nominative case to the subject “dizi”. According to the Wh-feature Attraction Principle defined in (4), the [+wh] feature of the wh-phrase “he fang he chu” is moved to the spec of CP in the embedded CP to check against the weak [+wh] feature of the null head complementizer. When it is moved there, the the weak [+wh] feature of the null head complementizer is checked off, the computation of the sentence converges.

Sentence (14) is similar in its derivation and its tree diagram is shown in Figure 5. For convenience of explanation, the matrix clause “dan bu zhi” is no included in the tree, nor are the other constituents irrelevant to the analysis.

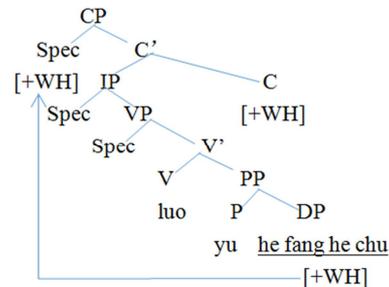


Figure 5. The tree diagram of sentence (14).

The arrow in the figure shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-phrase “he fang he chu”.

Similar to the relative clauses in (6-7), in (14) both the matrix subject and the embedded subject are empty. In the pro drop language of Chinese, it may be inferred from the context that the null subject in the matrix clause may refer to the speaker but the one in the embedded clause may refer to the previously mentioned individuals in (14), which means that “I don’t know where they will land on”. The wh-phrase “he fang he chu” in this example is not moved to the spec CP in the embedded clause, but its [+wh] feature is attracted by the weak [+wh] feature of the head C and moves to spec CP of the embedded clause for feature checking. Once the weak [+wh] feature of the head C is checked, the derivation converges and the embedded sentence can be interpreted as a wh-question.

Our analysis now naturally leads to the syntactic study of the focus movement of the wh-words in (11) and (13) rewritten as (26) and (27) below for the sake of convenience.

(26) Wo shi yi wei he ru?

(27) Ni xie le zhe chunwu, yi yu he wang?

In (26-27) the wh-word “he” is moved to the front of the preposition “ru” in (26) and the verb “wang” in (27). Such a movement is focus movement to check the strong [+foc] feature of the head focus in focus phrase instead of wh-movement to check the [+wh] feature of the head C. After the focus movement of the wh-word, its [+wh] feature is

raised to the spec CP to check off the weak [+wh] feature of the head C. Once the [+wh] feature of the head C is checked, the derivation of the sentence converges and the sentence is acceptable as shown respectively in Figure 6 and Figure 7. For convenience of analysis, the topic phrase “ni xie le zhe chunwu” is not drawn in the tree diagram in Figure 7.

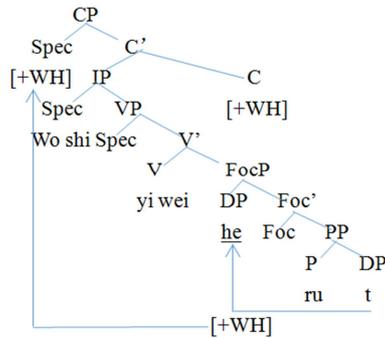


Figure 6. Focus movement of sentence (11).

- a) The right arrow shows the focus movement process of the wh-object “he”.
- b) The left arrow shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-object “he”.

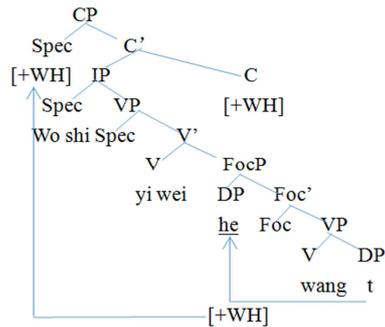


Figure 7. Focus movement of sentence (13).

- a) The right arrow shows the focus movement process of the wh-object “he”.
- b) The left arrow shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-object “he”.

The focus movement in the above examples in early modern Chinese is optional, unlike the wh-words in archaic Chinese which undergo object shift. In sentences (23-24), the wh-word “he” is not shifted to the front of the preposition as no focus movement is triggered in the sentences. The tree diagram of them may be shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9 respectively. In Figure 8 the wh-phrase “ru he” is not moved to the spec FocP position of the sentence in (13). Instead its [+wh] feature is attracted to the front of the sentence in spec CP position to check against the weak [+wh] feature of the head C in accordance with the Wh-feature Attraction Principle. Once the weak [+wh] feature of the head C is checked, the sentence may be interpreted as a wh-question. Similarly in Figure 9 the wh-phrase “ru he” stays in situ and it is not raised to the spec FocP for [+Foc] feature checking, as is the case in Figure 6.

The [+wh] feature of the wh-phrase “ru he” is attracted to move to spec CP position to check against the weak [+wh] feature of the head C in conformity with the Wh-feature Attraction Principle. Thus the weak [+wh] feature of the head C is checked, the sentence may be interpreted as a wh-question.

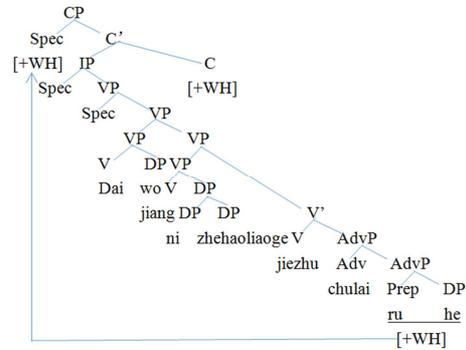


Figure 8. The tree diagram of (23).

The arrow in the figure shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-phrase “ru he”.

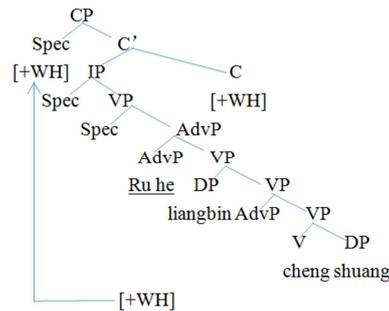


Figure 9. The tree diagram of (24).

The arrow in the figure shows the wh-feature attraction process of the wh-phrase “Ru he”.

Like the sentences in (23-24), the in situ wh-words in the other sentences may be accounted for in a similar way, in which the wh-XP stays in situ except that in light of the Wh-feature Attraction Principle, its [+wh] feature is displaced to the front of the sentence in spec CP position to check against the weak [+wh] feature of the head C.

6. Conclusion

In the earliest hand written copy of *A Story of the Stone*, commented by Zhi Yanzhai, thousands of Wh-Questions may be found in the story. In Chapter One, however, there are 21 Wh-Questions altogether, among which the object wh-words in 2 sentences are shifted before the verb or the preposition governing them, in 3 sentences the wh-words occur in relative clauses, and the other wh-words in the sentences remain in situ. None of these Wh-Questions carry question particles at the end of them. This may show that mood particles are used as affixes adjoined to the head C at the end of the sentences instead of head complementizers. The wh-words undergo object shift in the Wh-Questions are triggered to move to the

front of the verb or the preposition by the strong [+Foc] feature of the head Foc in FocP to check against the strong [+Foc] feature of the head. Then following the Wh-feature Attraction Principle, the wh-feature of the wh-words is attracted to the front of the sentence to check against the weak wh-feature of the head C. In relative clauses the wh-feature of the wh-words is attracted to the spec of CP in the embedded clause to check against the weak wh-feature of the head C. In other wh-in situ questions the wh-feature of the wh-words is attracted to the spec of CP in the matrix clause to check against the weak wh-feature of the head C. Once the weak wh-feature of the head is checked, the sentence may be interpreted as a wh-question.

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