ABSTRACT

Topic-comment constructions have attracted much research interest from Chinese linguistics scholars ever since Chao made the suggestion that the grammatical meaning of subject and predicate in a Chinese sentence is topic and comment, rather than actor and action. Over the past decades or so, there have still been heated debates about the relationship between topic and subject in Modern Chinese Grammar. The confusion arises from how to identify a concrete noun phrase at the preverbal position, whether it should be treated as a topic or a subject; and Chinese linguistics scholars even have had no consensus on the existence of topic in Modern Chinese Grammar. This study therefore presents data from a synchronic analysis of spoken Chinese in order to explore the syntactic status of the preverbal nouns phrases in Modern Chinese Grammar.

There are differences between subjects and topics in terms of a number of properties which they do not share. Thus topic and subject can be distinguished by their owned properties. We used the properties of topic and subject as criteria for determining whether a concrete preverbal noun phrases is a topic or a subject.

Most preverbal agents are typically coded as subjects. This thesis investigates only the non-agentive preverbal noun phrases in Modern Chinese Grammar. The findings indicate that there is coexistence of topic and subject in the Modern Chinese Grammar. However not all fronted non-agentive noun phrases should be treated as a topic. Semantically, sentence-initial noun phrases such as patient, dative, instrument, scope and certain locative noun phrases can be identified as topics.