Quantifier Scope Ambiguity: Theoretical and Methodological Issues

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Date: January 8, 2019 (Tuesday)
Time: 4:30 p.m. - 6:15 p.m.
Venue: Swire Hall 1, Fung King Hey Building
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract:

The traditional wisdom has it that Mandarin is a rigid-scope language in which doubly quantified sentences do not exhibit scope ambiguity (S.-F. Huang 1981, C.-T. J. Huang 1982, Lee 1986). Aoun and Li (1989), as well as more recent literature (Zhou and Gao 2009, Lin 2013, Wei et al. 2014, Wu et al. 2017, Larson and Wu 2018), have challenged this view based on a variety of quantified constructions that are claimed to be scopally ambiguous. These studies are, however, either based on problematic reasoning and data or short of independent justification or experimental evidence beyond researchers’ introspective judgments. In this talk, I will discuss some of the data cited in the literature, point out a number of methodological complications in the determination of quantifier scope ambiguity, and present results from pilot experiments which argue against the ambiguity thesis. The overall conclusion will be that there is in fact no reliable evidence that can support the claim that Mandarin permits inverse scope in doubly quantified sentences.

Speaker:

Cheng-Yu Edwin Tsai received his M.A. in Linguistics from National Tsing Hua University and Ph.D. in Linguistics from Harvard University, and has been an Assistant Professor at the Department of Linguistics and Translation of City University of Hong Kong since 2016. He has presented and published works on various topics in the syntax and semantics of Mandarin quantification. His recent projects include the distribution of numeral phrases, existential wh--phrases in Mandarin and Vietnamese, focus/quantificational particles (e.g. dou, jiu), and quantifier scope.

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