

# Indexicals in Chinese

Zhuoyun Wu†, Sumiyo Nishiguchi‡, Lu Guo\*, Yingxuan Wang\*  
 Graduate School of Commerce, Otaru University of Commerce\*\*\*  
 Center for Language Studies, Otaru University of Commerce‡  
 wu304728096@163.com† nishiguchi@res.otaru-uc.ac.jp‡

## 1 Introduction

This is a research about monsters, the context-change functions, and the words that are indexicals like tense adverbs, pronouns, etc. in Chinese. There are many researchers who wrote about indexicals in their own languages, but there is not a lot of research on Chinese. This paper discusses the indexical words in Chinese by giving some examples.

## 2. Pronouns

Like English, pronouns can also cause ambiguity in different contexts in Chinese. Normally, as in the example in (1), the first person indexical *wo* "I" ambiguously refers either to the speaker or the matrix subject Li.

- (1) Zuotian Li shuo wo qiantian  
 昨天, 李 说 我 前天  
 yesterday Li said I the day before yesterday  
 Zhong-de hua kai-le  
 种的 花 开了。  
 planted flower bloomed  
 "Yesterday, Li said the flower I planted the day before yesterday bloomed."  
 ✓ The flower was planted by Li.  
 ✓ The flower was planted by I.

The agent *wo* "I" is shifted in the scope of *shuo* "say."

- (2) Li shuo ni zuotian zhongde hua kai-le  
 李 说 你 昨天 种的 花 开了。  
 Li said you yesterday planted flower bloomed  
 "Li said the flower you planted yesterday bloomed."  
 ✓ Li is talking to me ---The flower was planted by me.  
 ✓ Li is talking to Ge ---The flower was planted by Ge.

The interpretation of the indexical *ni* "you" depends on the context and it can be the person Li talking to, and it has two different meanings.

- (3) Banzhang shuo ta bei tongzhi le mingtian  
 班长 说 他 被 通知 了 明天  
 monitor said he was informed tomorrow  
 qu nide bangongshi kaihui  
 去 你的 办公室 开会。  
 go your office meeting  
 "The monitor said that he was informed to go to the meeting at your office tomorrow."

In English, the pronoun *he* is ambiguous between a bound and free pronouns, that is, he can be the monitor or someone else salient in the context. In Chinese, *ta* 他 "he" also means monitor or someone else dominated by the conversation.

- (3) Meimei shuo ta/ta zuotian zhong-de  
 妹妹<sub>i</sub> 说 她<sub>i</sub>/他<sub>j</sub> 昨天 种的  
 sister said she/he yesterday planted  
 hua kaile  
 花 开了。  
 flower bloomed.  
 "My sister said the flower she/he planted yesterday bloomed."

When *ta* "he" is used in the sentence:

- ✓ The flower was planted by Ge.

When *ta* "she" is the pronoun in the sentence (3):

- ✓ The flower was planted by Wang.  
 ✓ The flower was planted by my sister.

The subject *sister* can only have a bound pronoun *she*. So, *he* is not ambiguous. The sentence with *he* has only one meaning. On the other hand, *she* is ambiguous and can be bound by the agent my sister:

(4) Li shou ni zuotian zai wo  
 李 说 你 昨天 在 我  
 Li<sub>[i]</sub> said you<sub>[speaker/w]</sub> yesterday in my<sub>[i/speaker]</sub>  
 Yangtai zhong-de hua kai-le  
 阳台 种 的 花 开了。  
 balcony planted flower bloomed.

a. "Li<sub>[i]</sub> said the flower you<sub>[speaker]</sub> planted in my<sub>[i]</sub>  
 balcony yesterday bloomed":

✓ The flower is planted by speaker.

✓ The flower is planted in Li's balcony.

b. "Li<sub>[i]</sub> said the flower you<sub>[w]</sub> planted in my<sub>[speaker]</sub>  
 balcony yesterday bloomed":

✓ The flower is planted by Wang.

✓ The flower is planted in speaker's balcony.

The personal pronouns *you* and *my* are shiftable. The interpretation of *my* depends on *you*.

If [you] means [speaker], then [my] means [Li];

If [you] means [Wang], then [my] means [speaker]:

### 3. Tense Adverbs

(5) Zuotian Li shuo wo qiantian  
 昨天, 李 说 我 前天  
 Yesterday Li said I the day before yesterday  
 zhongde hua kaile  
 种 的 花 开了  
 planted flower bloomed  
 "Yesterday, Li said the flower I planted the day  
 before yesterday bloomed."

In English, tense adverbs, like *yesterday*, *the day before yesterday*, *tomorrow* etc. are not shiftable even when there is another tense adverb in the sentence. In Chinese, in (5), *qiantian* "the day before yesterday" can only mean "two days ago from *now*", and can not mean "two days ago from 'yesterday'".

✓ The flower was planted 2 days ago (from now)

\* The flower was planted 3 days ago (from now)

(6) Banzhang shuo ta bei tongzhi-le mingtian  
 班长 说 他 被 通知 了 明天  
 monitor said he was informed tomorrow  
 qu ni-de bangongshi kaihui  
 去 你的 办公室 开会。  
 go your office meeting

Even though, in English, *tomorrow* cannot be shifted, in Chinese the reference of 明天 "tomorrow" is dominated by the timing of conversation.

(7) Li gangcai shuo Wu xianzai dei qu  
 李 刚才 说 武 现在 得 去  
 Li just said Wu now have to go to  
 laoshi-de bangongshi  
 老师 的 办公室  
 teacher's office .

"Li just said Wu have to go to teacher's office now."

✓ Wu have to go to teacher's office 3 minutes ago.

✓ Wu have to go to teacher's office right now.

*Now* is shifted by *just* in (7). *Just* means a past time, but not a very long time ago, i.e., 3 minutes ago. In contrast, *now* means the time speaker said this sentence.

(8) Li shangzhouyi zaoshang shuo ta xianzai  
 李 上周一 早上 说 他 现在  
 Li last Monday morning said he now  
 zai da lanqiu  
 在 打 篮球  
 Is playing basketball.

"Last Monday morning, Li said he was playing basketball now."

✓ Li was playing basketball last Monday's morning.

\* Li is playing basketball now.

*Now* only means last Monday morning

### 4. Location

(9) Li shuo ta zuotian zai zhe zhongde  
 李 说 他 昨天 在 这 种 的  
 Li said he yesterday here planted

Hua kai-le

花开了

flower bloomed.

"Li said the flower he planted here bloomed."

✓ Li planted flower in my balcony.

\* Li planted flower in his balcony.

*Here* can only mean the place the speaker is standing now. (If the speaker standing in my balcony now, the conversation happened in Li's balcony).

## 5. Conclusion:

For pronouns, words like *I, you, me, he, his*, can be ambiguous and determined by context in Chinese.

As for tense adverbs, words like *yesterday, tomorrow*, are shiftable when there is another tense adverb in the sentence may be shifted in Chinese.

Location adverbs like *here* and *there* are shiftable in Chinese.

## References

- [1] Anand, Pranav and Andrew Nevins. 2004. Shifty Operators in Changing Contexts. R. Young (ed), *SALT XIV 20-37*, Ithaca, 2004.
- [2] Chierchia, Gennaro. 1989. Anaphora and Attitudes De Se. R. Bartsch, J. van Benthem, and B. van Emde (eds.) *Language in context*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- [3] Cresswell, Maxwell J. 1985. *Structured meanings: The semantics of propositional attitudes*. MIT Press.
- [4] Frajzyngier, Zygmunt. 1993. *A grammar of Mupun*. Dietrich Reimer Verlag.
- [5] Heim, Irene, and Angelika Kratzer. 1998. *Semantics in generative grammar*. Blackwell.
- [6] Hyman, Larry. 1979. *Aghem Grammatical Structure*. Southern California Occasional Papers in Linguistics 7.
- [7] Yang, Lili. 2020. The Change of "I" Perspective and Empathy in Indirect Speech. *Soochow University College of Arts Central China Academic 2020,13(02)*