

# ATTENTION AND MANDARIN SYNTAX

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## ABSTRACT

There has been great interest in discourse notions like topic/theme and focus for the analysis of the grammar of Mandarin Chinese (i.e., pause particles, BA/BEI alternation, and word order change). However, theories of language Chinese linguistics as well as in general have often fallen short of providing definitions of linguistic ideas and concepts that are themselves not based or contextualized in language. Often, these ideas are subjective at best. For instance, the notion of topic in linguistics has been defined in reference to structural properties as the starting point of utterance or the initial position of a sentence. There has been no language-independent test of the notion topic. Among others, Tomlin (1995, 1997) designs a film to remedy this situation by defining topic in terms of attention, more specifically, attention detection, which is manipulated independently of language. Applying to Mandarin Chinese in a pilot study, we found that speakers' attention detection is mapped onto the first argument of the clause, and they have both word order change and BA/BEI construction alternation at their disposal to organize speech production.