1. The scope puzzle of Mandarin RCs

- English relative clauses (RCs) like (1a) are ambiguous. Under the head raising analysis of RCs (Kayne 1994, cf. 1b), the availability of inverse scope in (1a) derives from its availability in simple transitives (1c).
- Mandarin RCs (2a) also show the same ambiguity as their English counterparts. However, as widely noted (Huang 1982, Aoun and Li 1993), Mandarin simple transitives (2b) are unambiguous.

(1a) a. I have met three students that speak every language. (3 > ∀; ∃ ∀ > 3)
   b. [gei three students, [gei that [gei, speak every language]]]
   c. Three students speak every language. (3 > ∀; ∃ ∀ > 3)

(2a) a. Wo jian-guo [jiang mei-zhong yuanan de san-ge xuesheng].
   b. San-ge xuesheng jiang mei-zhong yuanan.
   c. I have met three students who speak every language.
   'Three students speak every language.' (3 > ∀; ∃ ∀ > 3)

2. Fox(2000) on scope interpretation

- Three assumptions for interpreting quantifier scope (illustrated in (3)):
  (i) quantifiers not in interpretable positions (roughly, those sister to a type <a,1> phrase), must raise to an interpretable position;
  (ii) obligatory quantifier raising (QR) and quantifier lowering (QL) obey Shortest Move;
  (iii) optional QR and QL are possible only when they yield a truth-conditional (TC) difference.

(3) Derivations of (1c)

3. TopP projection of Mandarin transitives

- Assume Mandarin transitives are identical to English up to TP, but contain an additional, higher TopP projection, to which Mandarin subjects typically raise (cf. Li and Thompson 1981, who characterize Mandarin as a "topic-prominent language").
- Assume that Top has no TC content.
- Then scope in (2b) is expected to be frozen under Fox(2002).

(4) Derivations of (2b)

4. Predictions and language data

- Predictions of this proposal:
  (i) in clausal environments where TopP is unavailable, Mandarin transitives should show Q-scopes ambiguity.
  (ii) ceteris paribus scope freezing in Mandarin should be confined to subjects and objects; direct objects and PP objects should show scope permutation.

- RCs like (2a) are widely held to involve a reduced left periphery that doesn’t include TopP (Rizzi 1997). Ambiguity in (2a) is thus expected: minus TopP, Mandarin RCs have essentially the same structure as English (1a), and allow ambiguity in the same way.
- Wu (2017) notes that Mandarin embedded clauses like (5a), strongly disfavor non-conservative topicalization (5b); they also more freely admit scope ambiguity than the corresponding matrix sentences (5c).
- Mandarin DP Datives like (6a) show scope ambiguity (cf. 6b); the inverse scope is even preferred given the pragmatics (Liu and Wu 2016).

(5) a. Jiangzhang shuo-guo [Zhangsan kanshou nei-ge chukou].
   c. Jiangzhang shuo [san-ge minjing kanshou nei-ge chukou].
   'The sheriff said Zhangsan guards every exit.' (3 > ∀; ∃ ∀ > 3)

5. Conclusion

- The scope puzzle introduced by Mandarin RCs leads to a wider rethinking of scope in Mandarin in which "scope freezing" is not a general property of the language, but rather found with subjects and objects when the former function as topics.
- In contexts like non-topical subjects, objects, etc., freezing disappears and Mandarin behaves more similarly to English, as expected under Fox (2000).

References: