On “Possessor Raising” in Mandarin Chinese\textsuperscript{1}\textsuperscript{,}2

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This paper argues that contra Gu (1992) and Xu (1993, 1999), a “possessor raising” account of the “external possession construction” (EPC) with respect to unaccusative verbs is untenable. It further argues that the existence of the unaccusative EPC is pragmatically motivated rather than, as the proponents of the raising account propose, syntactically motivated. Based on the fact that the unaccusative EPC is allowed in topic-prominent languages like Chinese, Japanese and Korean, but disallowed in subject-prominent languages like English, French and German, the paper hypothesizes that the existence of the unaccusative EPC is a reflection of the topic prominence of a language.

1. \textbf{Introduction}

This paper is concerned with the construction illustrated in (1). This construction is termed as the “double unaccusative construction” by Chappell (1999), as the “possessor-subject possessum-object construction” (or in Chinese, “lingzhu shubin ju”) by Guo (1990) and Xu (1999), as the “discontinuous possessive construction” by Teng (1974) and as the “ergative construction” by Xu (1993, 1999).

\begin{quote}
(1)  Zhangsan  xia-le    yi-zhi  yan.
Zhangsan  \textsc{blind}-\textsc{perf}  one-\textsc{cl}  \textsc{eye}
‘One of Zhangsan’s eyes became blind.’
\end{quote}

Recognizing the fact that only unaccusative verbs can participate in this construction and the fact that the construction can be regarded as a type of “external possessor construction,” I will use the “unaccusative external possessor construction” (henceforth, unaccusative EPC) to refer to the construction illustrated in (1), and define it as a construction in which a monadic unaccusative verb apparently takes two

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\textsuperscript{2}As is clear from later discussion, I use “possessor raising” in the title just for the purposes of convenience. In fact, the paper argues against the raising account of the Unaccusative “External Possessor Construction.”
“arguments,” one in the canonical subject position and the other in the canonical object position, and the two “arguments” form a possessive relationship, with the entity denoted by the “argument” in the canonical subject position being interpreted as the possessor of the entity denoted by the “argument” in the canonical object position. Hence in (1) the main verb xia ‘become blind’ is an unaccusative verb, and the entity denoted by the preverbal NP Zhangsan is semantically the possessor of the entity denoted by the postverbal NP yi-zhi yan ‘one eye.’

There are two different views as to what motivates the unaccusative EPC. This first view, argued for by Xu (1993, 1999), is that this construction is syntactically motivated and the surface structure is the result of an operation called “possessor raising.” The other view is that “this syntactic configuration has to be explained first of all in terms of its semantic and discourse motivation” (Chappell 1999: 196).

The main purpose of this paper is to argue against Xu (1993, 1999)’s syntactic account of the unaccusative EPC, and to propose a semantico-pragmatic account of this construction. The paper argues that the existence of the unaccusative ECP is pragmatically rather than syntactically motivated and that although the semantic constraint facilitates the integration and interpretation of the “extra argument,” the main motivation for the existence of the construction lies in discourse and information structure considerations. Moreover, based on the fact that the unaccusative EPC is allowed in topic-prominent languages like Chinese, Japanese and Korean, but disallowed in subject-prominent languages like English, French, and German, the paper hypothesizes that the existence of the unaccusative EPC is a reflection of the topic prominence of a language.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses Xu (1993, 1999)’s possessor raising account of the unaccusative EPC. Section 3 advances a semantico-pragmatic account of the phenomenon. Section 4 relates the unaccusative EPC to the topic prominence of Mandarin. And the final section summarizes the main points of the paper.

2. Xu (1993, 1999)’s possessor raising account

2.1 A synopsis of Xu’s account
Xu (1993, 1999) proposes a possessor raising account of the unaccusative EPC. According to him, the unaccusative EPC in (2) has the “D-structure” in (3).

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3 Chappell (1999) discusses the semantic constraints on this construction, but in fact she talks little about its discourse motivation. Although she mentions that the preverbal NP is the topic, she does not provide any argument for her position.

4 Since Gu (1992) follows Xu’s account, everything said below of Xu’s possessor raising account of the unaccusative EPC is equally applicable to Gu (1992)’s proposal. [A note to this note: Gu (1992) draws Xu’s ideas from his presentation at the 66th LSA annual meeting held in 1992 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but Xu’s paper was first published in 1993. Therefore the years of these two references give the wrong impression that Gu’s work precedes Xu’s.]
Xu (1999: 21, glosses and translation added)

Zhangsan diao-le liang-ke menya.
Zhangsan fall.out-PERF two-CL incisor

‘Two of Zhangsan’s incisors fell out.’

D-structure of the unaccusative EPC in (2) (Xu 1999: 21; cf. Xu 1993: 169)

Xu (1993, 1999) argues that a sentence in the form of (3) is ill-formed because

\textit{Zhangsan de liang-ke menya} cannot receive Case as the object of an unaccusative verb (or his “ergative verb”) as a result of Burzio (1986)’s generalization, which states that a verb that cannot assign a \( \theta \)-role to the subject fails to assign the accusative Case. Since an unaccusative verb has a null subject position at the D-structure, and assigns its only \( \theta \)-role to the object, it does not make sense to talk about \( \theta \)-role assignment to the subject. Therefore, \textit{Zhangsan de liang-ke menya} in (3) cannot receive accusative Case from the verb. As a result, (3) cannot pass the Case filter, which requires each argument NP to be case marked. Therefore, (3) is not well-formed.

Xu says that there are two ways to save the configuration in (3) from the Case filter. One is to move the whole postverbal NP to the subject position, which gives rise to (4). As a result of this moving operation, the NP in the subject position now receives the nominative Case from the “VP,” thus satisfying the Case filter. The other way is to move \textit{Zhangsan} alone to the subject position, which gives rise to (2). Then \textit{Zhangsan} in the subject position receives the nominative Case from the “VP” and the “retained object”

\footnote{Xu (1993, 1999) also advances a possessor raising account of the passive construction with a “retained object.” Although my discussion is only concerned with his account of the unaccusative EPC, what is said about his account of the unaccusative EPC is, to a large extent, also applicable to his account of the passive construction.}

\footnote{It should be pointed out that Xu (1993) assumes that the particle \textit{de} is absent in the D-structure, but is realized in the S-structure as a result of a later insertion after the whole postverbal NP moves to the empty preverbal NP position. In his more recent paper, Xu (1999) points out there are two possibilities with respect to \textit{de}. One possibility is the one adopted in Xu (1993) and the other possibility is that \textit{de} is present in the D-structure, but gets deleted while \textit{Zhangsan} alone moves to the empty preverbal NP. Although the second possibility is adopted by Xu (1999), he leaves open the question of whether \textit{de} is present at the D-structure.}
\textit{liang-ke menya} receives a “special Case”, namely the “partitive Case” from the verb.\footnote{The particle \textit{de} in (3) has to get deleted while \textit{Zhangsan} moves to the subject position (cf. note 6).} Therefore, on Xu’s account, (2) is derived from (3) through a possessor raising operation, which “[m]ove a possessor NP from a Spec/NP position to a Case-marked but non-thematic position in the syntax” (Xu 1993: 177).

\begin{itemize}
\item (4) Zhangsan de liang-ke menya diao-le.
\end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Zhangsan MM two-CL incisor fall.out-PERF
\end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item ‘Two of Zhangsan’s incisors fell out.’
\end{itemize}

Moreover, Xu (1993, 1999), following Belletti (1988), states that the assignment of the partitive Case “always selects an indefinite NP that carries it” (1993: 174). As a result of this “(In)definiteness Effect,” NPs like \textit{ling-ke men ya} ‘two incisors’ can remain in the postverbal position and receives the partitive Case, but NPs like \textit{Zhangsan de ling-ke menya} ‘Zhangsan’s two incisors’ cannot remain in the postverbal position because it is not compatible with the selectional property of the assignment of the partitive Case.\footnote{Xu (1993) also attributes the “ban” on definite NPs in the postverbal position in the unaccusative EPC to Chinese’s disallowing words with definite semantic effect to occur between the Spec.NP and the head noun. However, as shown in (i), Chinese does allow words with definite semantic effect like \textit{zhe} ‘this’ and \textit{na} ‘that’ to occur between the Spec.NP and the head noun. Therefore, the second reason proposed by Xu (1993) for the “(In)definite Effect” observed with respect to the postverbal NP in the unaccusative EPC does not hold.}

\begin{itemize}
\item (5) Zhangsan qi sui si-le fuqin.
\end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Zhangsan seven year die-PERF father
\end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item ‘When Zhangsan was seven years old, his father died.’
\end{itemize}

2.2 Problems with Xu’s account

There are at least two problems with Xu’s possessor raising account of the unaccusative EPC. First, since the possessor raising operation on Xu’s account is a way of satisfying the Case filter and since Mandarin has no overt nominative and partitive case markers, Xu’s account is too abstract to be natural.

Second, Xu’s account predicts that the postverbal NP in the unaccusative EPC cannot be definite. Although it is true that the postverbal NP in most cases is semantically indefinite, the postverbal NP \textit{fuqin} ‘father’ in (5) below is arguably definite, which indicates that the predication made by Xu’s account is not borne out.

\begin{itemize}
\item (5) Zhangsan qi sui si-le fuqin.
\end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Zhangsan seven year die-PERF father
\end{itemize}
\begin{itemize}
\item ‘When Zhangsan was seven years old, his father died.’
\end{itemize}
If the postverbal NP in (5) is just intuitively definite, the postverbal NP in (6) is obviously definite, as the head noun is modified with ‘that.’ Since in Mandarin the head noun can be left unexpressed if it is mentioned earlier in the same sentence and modified by elements like an AP, the underlined phrase in (6) unambiguously refer to the most beautiful flower. Since the underlined phrase is clearly definite, it poses a serious problem to Xu’s account.

(6) Na-ke shu luo na-duo hua bu hao, que pianpian
that-CL tree fall which-CL flower not good but unluckily
luo-le na-duo zui piaoliang-de.
fall-PERF that-CL most beautiful-MM
‘It would have been fine if any other flower of the tree had fallen, but unfortunately the one that fell was the most beautiful one.’

Given that the postverbal NP in the unaccusative EPC can be definite, Xu’s proposal that the postverbal NP receives the partitive Case from the verb and thus cannot be definite should be taken with some salt. Furthermore, given that the overt partitive Case in languages like Finnish expresses the partial nature of the referent of the noun it marks, the fact that in (5) the postverbal NP cannot be understood in any partial way also casts some doubt on Xu’s proposal that the postverbal NP in the unaccusative EPC receives the partitive Case. Although Xu could save his account by saying that the postverbal NP still receives a special case from the verb, this would sound like an ad hoc way of satisfying the Case filter.

Therefore, although Xu’s possessor raising account is theory-internally well-motivated, its abstract nature and the problems with the specific proposal that the postverbal NP in the unaccusative EPC receives the partitive Case and cannot be definite point to the conclusion that a case account of the unaccusative EPC is probably not on the right track. If satisfying the Case filter is not the motivation for the existence of the unaccusative EPC, then what motivates it?

3. An alternative: A semantico-pragmatic account
In this section, I will give a semantico-pragmatic account of the unaccusative EPC and argue that this construction is motivated by discourse and information structure considerations.9

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9 Teng (1974) argues that a “possessum lowering” account of the unaccusative EPC has its difficulties, and Chappell (1995) points out that an incorporation account has its problems too. As seen in section 2, a possessor raising account is problematic as well. Given this, in what follows I will assume that both the preverbal possessor NP and the postverbal possessum NP are base-generated.
3.1 Semantic constraints on the unaccusative EPC\textsuperscript{10}

There are two semantic constraints on the unaccusative EPC. First, the preverbal possessor NP and the postverbal possessum NP forms a relationship of inalienable possession, which is defined by Chappell (1999) as body parts and kin with human and animate possessors and as a part-whole relationship for inanimates. While the preverbal NP and the postverbal possessum NP may form a general possessive relationship as in (7-8), these examples are atypical and their acceptability varies from speaker to speaker.\textsuperscript{11}

Therefore, although in what follows I will use the “inalienability constraint” to refer to the first constraint on the construction, it should be recognized that a general possessive relationship is also possible.

(7) Zhangsan lan-le yi-kuang li.
Zhangsan rot-PERF one-CL pear
‘One basket of Zhangsan’s pears rotted.’

(8) Zhangsan si-le si-ke taoshu.
Zhangsan die-PERF four-CL peach.tree
‘Four of Zhangsan’s peach trees died.’

The other semantic constraint on the unaccusative EPC is that, as observed by Chappell (1999), there is an adversity feature intrinsic to the construction. The contrast between (9a) and (9b) shows the effect of the adversity constraint.

(9) a. Zhangsan bai-le ji-gen toufa.
Zhangsan white-PERF several-CL hair
‘Several of Zhangsan’s hairs have become white.’

b. *Zhangsan bai-le ji-ke ya.
Zhangsan white-PERF several-CL tooth
‘Several of Zhangsan’s teeth have become white.’

The adversity feature of the unaccusative EPC requires that only unaccusative predicates which express a “marked” adversative effect on the possessor (by means of an event that has affected the possessum) can participate in the construction (cf. Chappell 1999: 210-211). As a result, unaccusative predicates expressing fortunate events and more neutral events are not allowed in the unaccusative EPC. For example, (10) is bad because the unaccusative verb used describes a more or less neutral event.

\textsuperscript{10}This subsection draws insights from Chappell (1999).
\textsuperscript{11}Examples (7-8) are taken from Xu (1999: 18), with glosses and translation added. Xu [as well as Guo (1990)] presents such examples as grammatical. However, to me they sound less natural than those unaccusative EPCs which involve a relation of inalienable possession.
It should be noted that the inalienability constraint and the adversity constraint are closely related. As pointed out by Bally (1926/1995) and Shibatani (1994), among others, when an action is exerted on a part and negatively affects it, the whole is affected as well. The same cannot be said of the possessor in an alienable possession relationship. In fact, the adversative effect on the possessor will become less obvious, as the possessor in this case is likely to be absent from the scene and thus less likely to be directly affected by the main event described by the verb.

Chappell (1999) holds that it is the relation of inalienable possession that licenses the unaccusative EPC. For her, the preverbal position for the possessor is “an extra syntactic slot licensed by the constructional semantics of inalienable possession” (p. 220; cf. also p. 196). However, given the close relationship between the inalienability constraint and the adversity constraint, I think that both of them are licensing factors of the unaccusative EPC.

From the hearer’s point of view, both the inalienability constraint and the adversity constraint may facilitate the process of “semantic integration” [to use Shibatani (1994)’s words], by which the possessor—the “extra-thematic argument”—is semantically integrated into the proposition stated by the rest of the sentence to the effect that the referent of the extra-thematic argument is integrated into the scene evoked by the proposition. However, as for the motivation for the existence of the unaccusative EPC, the factors should be sought from the speaker’s point of view rather than from the hearer’s point of view. In the next subsection, I will propose that the unaccusative EPC is motivated by discourse and information structure considerations.

3.2 Pragmatic motivations for the unaccusative EPC

As pointed out by Teng (1974) and Guo (1990), the topic or “theme” of the unaccusative EPC and that of its genitive counterpart are different. For example, while (11a) is about ‘the house,’ its genitive counterpart (11b) is about ‘one of the walls of the house.’

    that-CL house fall-PERF one-CL wall
    ‘One of the walls of the house fell down.’

b. Na-ge fangzi de yi-mian qiang dao-le.
    that-CL house MM one-CL wall fall-PERF
    ‘One of the walls of the house fell down.’

On my view, it is precisely the speaker’s purpose to talk about the possessor/whole rather than the possessum/part that motivates the unaccusative EPC. A search of
examples of the construction on the internet confirms this intuition. Assuming that the topic of a sentence has to be given information, the examples I found show that the preverbal NP of the unaccusative EPC serves either as a “would-be” topic or functions as a topic in its real sense.\textsuperscript{12}

The first use of the unaccusative EPC is illustrated in (12). On this use, the possessor NP has not been established in the discourse and the unaccusative EPC offers an “all-new” description, but the referent of the possessor NP is introduced as an entity to be talked about. Therefore, from the point of view of discourse it is the possessor rather than the possessum that functions as a topic. As far as (12) is concerned, the part in boldface is the unaccusative EPC. Captain Ahab in this example is in fact mentioned the first time in the text, which is a summary of Herman Melville’s \textit{Moby Dick}. As is clear from the clauses immediately after the unaccusative EPC, it is the captain rather than his leg that is being talked about. Therefore, it is the referent of \textit{chuanzhang Yaha} ‘Captain Ahab’ rather than that of \textit{yi-tiao tui} ‘one leg’ that is introduced and established as a topic from the perspective of discourse.

\begin{verbatim}
(12) Liang-ren zou-shang-le yi-tiao bu-jing-chuan, zhe-sou
    two-person walk-on-PERF one-CL catch-whale-ship this-CL

    bu-jing-chuan-de chuanzhang Yaha duan-le yi-tiao tui,
    catch-whale-ship captain Ahab break-PERF one-CL leg

    shi yi-ge yizhili feichang qiang-de ren, ta yong ziji-de
    be one-CL willpower very strong-MM person he use self-MM

    yizhili he koucai yafu-le suoyou-de ren.
    willpower and eloquence overbear-PERF all-MM people

    ‘The two people step on a whale catcher. Ahab, the captain of the whaler, has one broken leg. He is a man with very strong willpower, and by using his own willpower and eloquence he overbears all the people.’

(www.hongen.com/edu/shfz/shlp/sd041901.htm)
\end{verbatim}

It should be pointed out that the first use of the unaccusative EPC as a way to give some “all-new” information from the point of view of the possessor only constitutes a small part of the examples of the construction. In the vast majority of the examples of the unaccusative EPC, the entity denoted by the possessor NP has been mentioned (and talked about) earlier before its reoccurrence in the unaccusative EPC. As in this case the possessor NP is given information, we can say for sure that on this use the possessor NP

\textsuperscript{12} Although Chappell (1999) mentions twice in her paper (on page 200 and page 220, respectively) that the preverbal possessor NP is a kind of topic, she does not justify her position. Cf. note 3.
is a topic in its real sense. Moreover, the clauses immediately after the unaccusative EPC make it clear that it is the possessor rather than the possesee that is being further talked about. In (13), for example, \textit{ta} ‘he’ in the boldfaced unaccusative EPC is coreferential with \textit{Hua Tuo}. In fact, its pronominal form clearly indicates that its referent has been established in the discourse. So \textit{Hua Tuo} is the topic of the unaccusative EPC. Moreover, it is also the topic of the clauses immediately following the unaccusative EPC, as these clauses are about Hua Tuo rather than about his father.

(13) Hua Tuo cong-xiao jiu hen jimin. Chuanshuo ta qi sui
Hua Tuo from-childhood already very astute it is said he seven year
si-le fuqin, jiazhong pinkun, muqin rang ta qu qiu fuqin
die-PERF father family poor mother let he go request father
shengqian haoyou Cai yisheng xue yi.
before.death good.friend Cai doctor study medicine

‘Hua Tuo was already very astute from childhood. It is said that when he was seven years old, his father died. His family was poor, and his mother let him go request Doctor Cai, one good friend of his father’s before his death, to accept him as his pupil and let him study medicine with him.’
(www.epochtimes.com/b5/2/6/1/n193801.htm)

Therefore, although the relation of inalienable possession and the adversity constraint are also responsible for making this construction possible, the existence of the unaccusative EPC is primarily motivated by the speaker’s purpose to say something about the possessor instead of the possesee. In other words, although the relation of inalienable relation and the adversity constraint provides some possibility for the possessor NP and the possesee NP to occur in discontinuous syntactic positions, it is the discourse and information structure considerations that realize this possibility and motivate the unaccusative EPC.

3.3 Indefiniteness of the possesee NP
After discussing the semantic constraints and the pragmatic motivation of the unaccusative EPC, I now turn to the question of whether this sematico-pragmatic account can explain the fact that the possesee NP in a typical unaccusative EPC is in some non-definite form. I think that our account can naturally explain this.

First of all, it is a well-known fact in Chinese as well as in other languages that new information is usually introduced in some non-definite form. Since in the unaccusative EPC, the possessor NP is usually presented as given information and the verb and the postverbal NP are usually expressed as new information, it is not so surprising that the
postverbal NP is normally in some non-definite form. Our account predicates that if the referent of the possessum NP has been established in the discourse, the possessum NP in the unaccusative EPC can be in definite form.\textsuperscript{13} The fact that the following constructed conversation is acceptable shows that our prediction is correct.

(14) A: Zhaopian-shang-de na-ge ren shi wo-de yi-ge hao pengyou. 
    picture-on-MM that-CL person be I-MM one-CL good friend 
    Ta-de zuo-yan xia-le. 
    he-MM left-eye blind-PERF/SFP

B. Na tai can la! Ta shenmo shihou xia-de na-zhi yanjing? 
    that too tragic SFP he what time blind-DE that-CL eye

A. Dagai shi san nian qian ba. 
    probably be three year ago SFP

`A: The person on the photo is one good friend of mine. His left eye is blind. 
B: That’s too bad! When did that eye become blind? 
A: Probably three years ago.’

If the possessum can be realized as a definite NP in the unaccusative EPC in an appropriate context, then why is this impossible when out of context, as (15) shows?

    Zhangsan blind-PERF that-CL eye
    Intended: ‘That eye of Zhangsan’s became blind.’

b. *Zhangsan xia-le ta-de yanjing. 
    Zhangsan blind-PERF he-MM eye
    Intended: ‘Zhangsan’s eye became blind.’

I think that the badness of the examples in (15) is due to the inalienability constraint and to the fact that the verbs involved are unaccusatives. For purposes of exposition, compare the examples in (15) with those in (16).

    Zhangsan make-blind-PERF that-CL eye
    ‘Zhangsan made that eye blind.’

\textsuperscript{13} As the example in (6) shows, another situation that allows a definite postverbal possessum NP in the unaccusative EPC is one in which contrast is clearly involved.
b. Zhangsan **nong-xia-le** ta-de yanjing.
   Zhangsan make-blind-PERF he-MM eye
   ‘Zhangsan made his eye blind.’

Note that when the same NPs are used with transitive resultative verb compounds (in boldface) in (16), the examples in (15) become grammatical. However, the eye denoted by **na-zhi yanjing** in (16a) is not necessarily Zhang’s. In fact, it is more likely to be someone else’s. Similarly, **ta** ‘he’ in (16b) is not necessarily coreferential with Zhangsan. Therefore, the eye involved is not necessarily Zhangsan’s, either; in fact it is equally possible to be his or someone else’s. Based on this, we may conclude that the badness of the examples in (15) can be attributed to the fact that the definite possessum NP invites an interpretation that the postverbal NP and the preverbal NP does not necessarily form a possessive relationship, which is incompatible with the inalienability constraint on the unaccusative EPC. Further note that the definite possessum NP in (15) seem to add some transitivity power to the examples and make them be understood as true transitive sentences as those in (16). However, this interpretation is incompatible with the fact that the verbs in the unaccusative EPC are unaccusatives, which are monadic verbs and cannot take two true arguments.  

Based on the above discussion, I conclude that the fact that the possessum NP in the unaccusative EPC is typically in non-definite form is partly due to the inalienability constraint and the nature of the main verb involved, and partly due to the information structure of the construction.

4. Unaccusative EPC and topic prominence

While the unaccusative EPC is grammatical in Mandarin, its counterpart is not allowed in English, as evidenced by (17).

(17) a. *The tree fell some flowers.*
    b. *That plant rotted several leaves.*
    c. *Hamlet died the father.*

Given that Chinese as a topic-prominent language allows the unaccusative EPC and English as a subject-prominent language does not, and given that the unaccusative EPC is motivated by information structure considerations, or more specifically by considerations as to whether the possessor NP or the possessum NP is intended to be the topic of the sentence, we hypothesize that the existence of the unaccusative EPC is a

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14 Although the unaccusative EPC apparently takes two arguments, from a semantic point of view only the possessum NP is an argument of the unaccusative verb. It is probably because of this that the preverbal NP and the postverbal NP have to form a possessive relationship.

15 See Li & Thompson (1976) and Li (2004), among others, for discussions of the typology of languages according to their topic prominence and subject prominence.
reflection of the topic prominence of a language. If this is correct, we may claim that only topic-prominent languages allow the unaccusative EPC, or more exactly only languages with some topic prominence allow the construction. As seen below, the data from Japanese and Korean provides some evidence for this claim.

As seen from (18) and (19), both Japanese and Korean can be argued to have the unaccusative EPC. Since the two languages are both verb-final languages, it is impossible to find an exact counterpart (i.e. with the same word order) of the Chinese unaccusative EPC in these two languages. However, since ‘suddenly’ and ‘quietly’ in (18-19) are manner adverbs which modify VPs, the fact that these two adverbs can occur before the possessum NP indicates that this NP and the verb together form a VP and that the possessum NP stays in situ. Therefore, it can be concluded that (18) and (19) are Japanese and Korean counterparts of Chinese unaccusative EPCs.

(18) Japanese
a. Ken-ga pokkuri neesan-ga sin-da
   Ken-NOM suddenly older.sister-NOM die-PERF
   lit., ‘It is Ken whose older sister died suddenly.’ (Takahashi 1999: 229)
b. Bki-ga shizukani ha-ga oti-ta.
   tree-NOM quietly leaf-NOM fall-PERF
   ‘The leaves of the tree have quietly fallen.’

(19) Korean
   Zhangsan-NOM suddenly father-NOM die-PAST
   ‘Zhangsan’s father died.’
b. Ce namu-ka coyonghakey iph-i cye-ssta.
   that tree-NOM quietly leaf-NOM fall-PAST
   ‘The leaves of the tree fell quietly.’

Japanese and Korean are classified as both topic-prominent and subject-prominent languages by Li & Thompson (1976). The fact that these two languages allow the unaccusative EPC is consistent with and provides support for our claim that only languages with some topic prominence allow this construction.

Further support for our claim comes from French and German, which are subject-prominent languages, but not topic-prominent languages on Li & Thompson’s typology. Our claim predicts that these two languages should not allow the unaccusative EPC. The following facts show that our prediction is borne out.

(20) French
   Zhangsan died the father in 1967.
   Intended: ‘Zhangsan’s father died in 1967.’
b. *Hier l’arbre tombèrent les feuilles.
   yesterday the.tree fell the leaves
   Intended: ‘The leaves of the tree fell yesterday.’

(21) German\textsuperscript{16}

a. *Zhangsan starb der Vater.
   Zhangsan.NOM died the father.NOM
   Intended: ‘Zhangsan’s father died.’

b. *Der Baum fielen die Blätter ab.
   the tree.NOM fell the leaves off
   Intended: ‘The leaves of the tree fell.’

\textsuperscript{16} It is worth pointing out that, as shown in (i), the sentences in (21) become grammatical when ‘Zhangsan’ and ‘tree’ are in the dative case.

(i) a. Zhangsan starb der Vater.
   Zhangsan.DAT died the father.NOM
   ‘Zhangsan’s father died.’

b. Dem Baum fielen die Blätter ab.
   the tree.DAT fell the leaves off
   ‘The leaves of the tree fell.’

At first sight, the examples in (i) are unaccusative EPCs. However, there are two facts that suggest that the sentences in (i) are not really the counterpart of the unaccusative EPC in Mandarin. First, as shown in (ii), the possessor and the possessum can switch positions in German, but as shown in (iii) this possibility is not allowed in Mandarin.

(ii) a. Der Vater starb Zhangsan.
   the father.NOM died Zhangsan.DAT
   ‘Zhangsan’s father died.’

b. Die Blätter fielen dem Baum ab.
   the leaves fell the tree.DAT off
   ‘The leaves of the tree fell.’

(iii) a. *Fuqin si-le Zhangsan.
   father die-PERF Zhangsan
   Intended: ‘Zhangsan’s father died.’

b. *Yezi luo-le na-ke shu.
   leave fall-PERF that-CL tree
   Intended: ‘The leaves of the tree fell.’

Second, the preverbal NP and postverbal NP in (i), particularly (ia), do not necessarily form a relation of inalienable possession or a general possessive relationship. For example, given an appropriate context, ‘the father’ in (ia) can refers to someone else’s father other than Zhangsan’s. In consideration of these two facts, we conclude that the examples in (i) are not true unaccusative EPCs.
Obviously our claim that only languages with some topic prominence allow the unaccusative EPC need to be tested against more languages. But the fact that topic-prominent languages like Chinese, Japanese, and Korean allow this construction and subject-prominent languages like English, French, and German do not does provide some initial support for our claim and for our hypothesis that the unaccusative EPC is a reflection of the topic prominence of a language.

5. Summary and conclusions
In this paper I have provided a semantico-pragmatic account of the unaccusative EPC in Mandarin Chinese. I have shown that the possessor raising account of the unaccusative EPC by Gu (1992) and Xu (1993, 1999) is unnatural and untenable because of its abstractness, and because of the problems with the specific proposal that the postverbal NP in the construction receives the partitive Case and cannot be definite. I have also shown that there are two semantic constraints on the unaccusative EPC, one being the inalienability constraint and the other the adversity constraint. Both constraints provide the possibility for the possessor NP and the possessum NP to occur in discontinuous syntactic positions, and in that sense both of them are licensing factors of the construction.

More importantly, I have argued that the unaccusative EPC is pragmatically motivated. Although the relation of inalienable possession and the adversity constraint are also responsible for making this construction possible, the existence of the unaccusative EPC is primarily motivated by the speaker’s purpose to say something about the possessor instead of the possessee. The fact that the attested examples overwhelmingly show that the possessor in the construction serves as the topic of the sentence provides crucial support for this argument. I have also argued that the possessum NP in the unaccusative EPC is typically in non-definite form is partly due to the inalienability constraint and the nature of the main verb involved, and partly due to the information structure of the construction.

Finally, I related the unaccusative EPC to the topic prominence of Mandarin Chinese. Based on the fact that Chinese allows the unaccusative EPC and English does not, and based on the argument that the unaccusative EPC is motivated by information structure considerations, I hypothesized that the existence of the unaccusative EPC is a reflection of the topic prominence of a language, and claimed that only languages with some topic prominence allow this construction. Data from topic-prominent languages like Japanese and Korean and subject-prominent languages like French and German provides further support for our claim and hypothesis.
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