that "subject" and "object" can both be filled by any semantic role, and are to a certain extent interchangeable. One of the examples of what he meant by "interchangeable" is the following:

2. a. 窗戶已經糊了紙。
   Chuānghu yì jǐng hú-le zhǐ.
   'The window has already been pasted with paper.'

b. 紙已經糊了窗戶。
   Zhǐ yì jǐng hú-le chuānghu.
   'The paper has already been pasted on the window.'

The difference is just in which element is chosen to be the topic that the clause is about; there is no difference in the verb or any other marking or behavior. There are no grammaticalized selectional (subcategorization/argument structure) restrictions on the relationship between the topic and the comment, in the way there are in the subject-predicate structure and many other constructions in English. The topic may not even be an argument of the verb at all, as in the first part of (5) below. In Mandarin, the only requirement is that the addressee can infer the aboutness relation between the topic and the comment. This means that the structure does not assist in referent role tracking (does not constrain the inference of the role of referents in discourse) in Chinese the way it does in English; it is simply based on information structure (see Van Valin 1987; Comrie 1989; LaPolla 2006a, 2006b on grammatical relations as referent tracking devices restricting the interpretation of the role of referents in discourse). Tsao (1987, 1990) accepted the topic-comment nature of the Chinese clause and expanded it to define the sentence as a topic chain, where a single topic may have more than one comment. He also showed that a single clause may have up to three topics. I have argued a similar line (LaPolla 1993, 1995, 2009; LaPolla and Pao 2005, 2006), and will exemplify that view in this article. Li and Thompson (1976, 1978, 1981:15–20) also recognized that word order does not determine grammatical relations, and recognized topics in
Chinese, but also argued for subject in Chinese, distinguished from the use of the word by Chao and Lù, saying it must have “a direct semantic relationship with the verb as the one that performs the action or exists in the state named by the verb” (1981:15). They also distinguished it from the concept of subject in English, as in Chinese “subject is not a structurally definable notion” (1981:19) the way it is in English. In this view then the clause has a subject (defined on semantic rather than grammatical grounds, i.e., it is the actor), but there is often a topic (defined as some topical element other than “the one that performs the action or exists in the state named by the verb”) that precedes the subject as well. This is different from English and other European languages, and so they argued there are two types of language: “subject-prominent” (e.g., English) and “topic-prominent” (e.g., Chinese). Both types of language have both subject and topic, but the prominence of subject vs. topic differs in the two types. In saying that there is no grammatically definable subject, though, Li and Thompson are actually agreeing with Chao and Lù that there is no grammatical subject, but differ from Chao and Lù in defining subject as a particular semantic role, whereas Chao and Lù each explicitly said their conception of subject is not related to semantic role; Chinese subjects are simply topics. Many linguists, though, in China and without (e.g., Shi 2000; Liu 2001, 2004, 2009), incorrectly assume that what Li and Thompson meant by “topic-prominent” is that there is a grammatical subject-predicate relation, and only when a non-agent argument appears as topic is it a topic-comment construction, even though Chao and Lù showed there is no empirical justification for such a distinction, and Li and Thompson did not argue for such a grammatical subject.

In this article we will look at various constructions in Mandarin Chinese and show that the patterns found can all be explained using concepts of information structure, essentially topic-comment. As argued in LaPolla (2009), if information structure can explain all of the patterns found, then there is no justification for positing grammatical relations. We will be using the framework proposed by Lambrecht (1994) for discussing information structure. The topic-comment structure, called “predicate focus” in Lambrecht’s framework, is seen as one of three types of information structure, and the most common type found in texts. The other two are less common, and have marked meanings/usages: narrow focus (or “argument focus”), in which a single argument or other element in the clause is singled out as the focus of information; and “sentence focus”, where there is no topic, and the entire clause is in focus. The latter is what we often find in presentational clauses and event-reporting, as with the example mentioned above, Xià yǔ le [fall rain csm] ‘It’s raining’ (ex. 1) and also yǒu rén zhǎo nǐ [exist person look.for 2sg] ‘There is someone looking for you’. We will begin with the basic topic-comment structure, as in the bracketed parts of the following natural examples. In the second line of (4b) and in (5) there are two comments following one topic. (Note: the sources of the example sentences in this article are listed at the end of the article.)

3. 对不起，我累了。 Duìbùqǐ, [wǒ] TOPIC [lèi le] COMMENT sorry 1sg tired CSM ‘Sorry, I’m tired.’

4. a. 學生發了成績，孩子們的學習成績挺不錯的。 [Xuéshēng] TOPIC [fā-le student distribute-pfv chéngjì] COMMENT [háizímen de xuéxi marks children assoc study chéngjì] TOPIC [tīng bú-cuò marks very neg-wrong de] COMMENT NMLZ ‘The students were given their marks today, the children’s marks were really not bad.’

The double topic construction (sometimes called the "double subject" or "double nominative" construction—Teng 1974) is where the comment about the topic is in fact a topic-comment structure, i.e., [Topic [Topic-Comment]Comment]. The two topics often are understood to be related in some way, such as whole-part or possessor-possessed, and can often be rephrased as a single noun phrase. Related to this construction is another common clause pattern with two elements related as whole-part or possessor-possessed, the "retained object" (or "split referent", "split topic") construction (e.g., Liú 2001).

The "double topic" and "retained object" constructions are actually variants of each other, though they are often treated as very different structures by grammarians. In the "retained object" construction the two elements do not appear together; one appears as a topic (often primary but sometimes secondary topic) and the other appears in the focus, instead of also being topical. Again, the difference between these two is simply whether a certain element is treated as a topic or as part of the focus. In the two examples in (6) the skin of the apple is treated either as part of the focus (6a) or as a secondary topic (6b). That is the only grammatical difference between these two structures.

6. a. The apple in Luò Wǎnqíng’s hand had already been peeled of its skin.
   [Luò Wǎnqíng shǒu-zhōng de 英国泥菩萨過江，還為韓國操心?
   Yingguó] TOPIC [ni pùsà guò 英格兰 泥塑菩萨过 cross jiāng] COMMENT, [hái wéi Hánguó 河流 still for Korea cǎoxīn] COMMENT?
   concerned ‘England can’t help itself (‘clay bodhisattva crossing the river’ is part of a longer expression for showing vulnerability), and yet is still worried about Korea?’

The topic can be any argument of the verb in the comment (compare (4a)–(4c)), but it does not have to be an argument of the verb, that is, it does not have to have a selectional relationship to the verb in the comment; there only needs to be an inferable topic-comment relationship, as in (5). Notice in comparing (4a)–(c) that the interpretation of the role of the topic relative to the verb in the comment (i.e., that the student is a recipient but the teacher is an actor and the marks are the thing sent) is based entirely on inference from assumptions about the nature of the referents and the action involved; it is not marked grammatically anywhere in the clause, that is, the grammar does not constrain the inference of the relationship between the referent and the action, as it does, for example, in English.

There are a number of variations on this basic structure in terms of what appears in the comment. It can be a simple comment, as in (3)–(5), or the comment can be a complex structure which is an event structure or a construction with a secondary topic such as the “double topic” construction or the bā- 把 and bèi- 被 constructions.

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xiǎo-hǎo-le|comment|COMMENT-
peel-complete-PFV
‘When Mù Shíqīng again lifted his head, the apple in his hand, the skin was already peeled.’

In other cases there are two topics, but they are not related as possessor-possessed or whole-part, as in Chao’s (1968:325) well known example, given in (7), often used in grammar texts as an example of an ambiguous sentence, as in different contexts it can mean either of the two translations given.

7. 這個人誰都不認得。
Zhè-ge rén shéi dōu bù rènde.
‘Nobody knows this man.’ / ‘This man doesn’t know anybody.’

The bā- and bèi-constructions also have a primary topic and a secondary topic. In the bā-construction (8) the primary (initial) topic is some sort of cause, and the secondary topic, which follows bā, is the one most affected by the action indicated in the comment (cf. Tsao 1987). As shown in LaPolla (2013), there is no necessary selectional relationship between the post-bā element and the main verb, and the element following bā does not have to be an NP. The use of bā is also optional in many cases (compare (9a–b)). In those cases the secondary topic nature of the post-bā constituent is very clear.

8. 創造的衣服把我變的太可愛了[…]
Yīnwéi zhè tào yīfu bā wǒ biàn
de tài kě’ài le,[…]
ADV too cute CSM
‘Because these clothes made me (look) too cute,[…]’

9. a. 我把錢都給了你了啊，現在說我沒錢。
Wǒ bǎ qián dōu gěi-le nǐ le
top now say 1sg not.have money
‘I gave all the money to you, now you say I have no money.’

In the bèi-construction (10) the primary topic is the one most affected by the action of the comment, while the secondary topic is some sort of cause. As pointed out by Chao (1968:75), and as we have seen in the examples above, Chinese verbs have no predetermined “direction of action”, so these constructions can be used in order to make the direction of action explicit. Very often only the primary topic, the effected element, is mentioned, and there is no overt representation of a cause as secondary topic, so the use of bèi, which is optional in many cases, helps to constrain the interpretation of the role of the referent to non-actor rather than actor (see LaPolla 1992, 1994 on the frequency of such non-agentive marking in Sino-Tibetan languages).

10. 武漢 ”生命” 雕塑被網友評為最丑雕塑。
Wǔhàn “shēngmìng” diāosù bèi
netizens judge as most ugly sculpture
‘The “Life” sculpture in Wǔhàn has been judged as the most ugly sculpture by netizens.’

The sentence-focus event-reporting structure, such as xià yǔ le [fall rain CSM] ‘It’s raining’ (1i above), has the representation of the main participant of the action represented by the expression in post-verbal position to show that it is not the topic of the action. Compare the bracketed structures in the following examples, where in one case the referent of qiāo-mén-shēng
敲門聲 is a topic (9a), and in the other the referent of qiāo-mén-shēng is part of an event structure (1ib) (in (1ib) there is only the event/comment and no topic; the elements preceding the comment are temporal and spatial scene-setting elements, not topics in the sense of being what the comment is about).
11. a. People普查的敲門聲響起時，你會開
門嗎?

[Renkoupucha de qiiao-men-
census ASSOC knock-door-
sheng]TOPIC [xiang-qi]COMMENT shi,
sound make.sound-INCHO time ni hui kai men ma?

'Then the sound of the census (people) knocking at your door is heard, will you open the door?'

b. 正說著，門外忽然響起了砰砰砰的急
急的敲門聲。

Zheng shuo-zhe, men wai [huran
just talk-DUR door outside suddenly
xiang-qi-le pengpengpeng
make.sound-INCHO-PFV ONOMA
de ji-ji de ASSOC urgent-urgent ASSOC
qiiao-men-sheng]COMMENT
knock-door-sound

Just as (he) was talking, suddenly outside there was the sound of urgent knocking on the door.

(Youyang 1959:245)

In (11a), the knocking at the door is treated as a topic, and so appears before the comment xiangqi 韇響 'begins to sound'. In (11b), on the other hand, the knocking at the door is treated as part of an event that suddenly happened, and so appears after xiangqi as part of the event structure. This simple difference explains the difference in word order.

Aside from being used in sentence focus situations (i.e., without a topic), the same event structure can also appear as the comment about some topic. For example, in (12), the dying of the horse is treated not as a comment about the horse (although that would be possible with a different word order); in this context the dying of the horse is treated as an event, and this event is made the comment about the woman in the story. The usual interpretation of this structure (topic + event structure) is that the event had an effect on the topic (often a negative one, as in this case, as shown by the second comment).

12. 她死了一匹馬，便這麼哭個不住。

[Ta]TOPIC [si-le yi pi ma]COMMENT
3SG die-PFV one CLF horse
[bian zhe me ku ge bu-zhu]COMMENT
then this.much cry CLF NEG-stop

'She had a horse die on her, (and she) cries this much without stopping.'

If we assume an SVO or any other subject-based analysis of Chinese, we run into serious problems with the type of structure in the first topic-comment structure of (12), which is quite common in Chinese. If we try to say that 'she' is the subject and 'one horse' is the object, then we must assume that 'die' is a transitive verb, or at least has a transitive use. But this goes against what Chinese speakers feel about this sentence. It isn't that 'she' caused the death of the horse, or had anything to do with the death of the horse, but that the horse died, and this has affected her in some way, that is, she experienced the event of her horse dying. If we use the topic comment analysis, we can see that 'she' is the topic, and 'die a horse' is presented as an event. It is the horse that died, but the dying is not presented as a comment about the horse, but as an event of horse-dying, and this event functions as the comment about 'she'.

In the following example we see both uses in a single stretch of discourse:

13. 特別喜歡下雪。喜歡下雪後白茫茫的一片很純淨的感覺。希望今年的第
一場雪早點下吧！

1. Tbei xiuhan xia xuex.

especially like fall snow

2. Xiuhan xia xuex hou baimangmang

like fall snow after glisteningly.white
de yi pian hen chunjing
ASSOC one CLF very pure
de ganju.
ASSOC feeling

3. Xiwang [jinnian de di yi chang

hope this.year ASSOC ORD-one CLF
xue]TOPIC [zao di dan xia ba]COMMENT
snow early a.bit fall HORT
(I) especially like snow (lit: ‘the falling of snow’). (I) like the feeling of purity of the glisteningly white snow after a snowfall.
(I) hope this year the first snow (of the season) will fall a bit earlier!

In lines (13.1) and (13.2) ‘snow’ is not treated as topical, but is treated as part of the event ‘the falling of snow’, and so follows the verb, whereas in line (13.3) the (first) snow (of the season) is treated as topical, and so precedes the verb.

In this chapter we have discussed the major clause types of Mandarin Chinese, and shown how they can be explained using the concepts of topic and comment. We have also seen that word order does not determine, and is not determined by grammatical or semantic relations, so calling Chinese an “SVO” language, or even “topic-prominent” language, as this is often understood, is inappropriate. The appearance of what is called “SVO” is due to the fact that the topic precedes the verb and the focal elements follow it, and actors are much more frequent as topics and undergoers are much more frequent as focal elements (see Sun and Givón 1985 for statistics; see LaPolla and Poa 2005, LaPolla 2009 for more discussion on Chinese clause structure as being governed by information structure; LaPolla and Poa 2006 on why terms like “SVO” are inappropriate in word order typology; and see Lee 2001 for data showing that Cantonese is largely governed by the same principles).

**Web-references for Example Sentences**

4b: [http://ahfcmbcz.30edu.com/news/86f73644-9e05-423b-90f5-42966a0a8e13/0c3b9d2d-1801-4220-a883-e0dacc220af0.html](http://ahfcmbcz.30edu.com/news/86f73644-9e05-423b-90f5-42966a0a8e13/0c3b9d2d-1801-4220-a883-e0dacc220af0.html)
4d: [http://blog.ifeng.com/article/8185482.html](http://blog.ifeng.com/article/8185482.html)
8: [http://www.wretch.cc/blog/gitbox/465825](http://www.wretch.cc/blog/gitbox/465825)
9a: [http://www.show160.com/xiaopin/23551.htm](http://www.show160.com/xiaopin/23551.htm)
9b: [http://blog.163.com/just_huanru@212/blog/static/1799200620137110108159](http://blog.163.com/just_huanru@212/blog/static/1799200620137110108159)
11a: [http://dg.focus.cn/msgview/500126/20137378.html](http://dg.focus.cn/msgview/500126/20137378.html)
12: Jin Yong 金庸: Lián Chéng Jué 连城诀, Chapter 6; [http://louisville.edu/journal/weiming/wuxia/liantian.cn/](http://louisville.edu/journal/weiming/wuxia/liantian.cn/)

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