INTRODUCTION

Word order in naturally occurring conversations in Beijing Mandarin can be drastically different from that in formal Chinese, written as well as spoken. However, their difference has been largely ignored in the standard descriptive grammars of Chinese which typically describe features of formal Chinese. One very striking feature in word order in Beijing conversational discourse is the inversion of various preverbal elements, such as subject, auxiliary, and adverb, to the end of a sentence. These kinds of sentences have been referred to as ‘inverted’ sentences and are illustrated below. (In the examples, ASP, CL, and PRT are abbreviations for aspect marker, classifier, and particle, respectively.)

1) Beijing ren, ta?
   person, he
   ‘Is he a native of Beijing?’

2) Lai-le ma, ni gege?
   come-ASP PRT your brother
   ‘Did your brother come?’

3) Jinlai ba, ni.
   enter-come PRT you
   ‘Come in, you!’

4) Yigong tamen shi liu ge ren, yinggai.
   total they be six CL person should
   ‘There should be six of them altogether.’

5) Zou-le ba, dagai.
   leave-ASP PRT probably
   ‘(He) has probably left.’
The main purpose of this paper is to identify some motivations for their occurrence in terms of communicative functions and organizational mechanisms unique to conversational discourse.

In Section 2, some preliminaries are provided. Section 2.1 delimits the class of inverted sentences to be dealt with; section 2.2 identifies some functional and organizational characteristics of conversation which are relevant to the identification of motivations for inverted sentences. Section 3 describes our data base. In Section 4, we use several excerpts from our corpus of conversations to show that inverted sentences are ascribable to at least three motivations: thematization, repair, and afterthought appendage. In Section 5, we draw some conclusions, proposing that inverted sentences can serve as a vantage point for the study of word order in other types of discourse in Chinese as well as in other languages.

2. PRELIMINARIES

2.1 ‘Inverted Sentences’

Chao (1968:69) used the term ‘inverted sentences’ to refer to sentences such as (1)-(3), of which the normal order of subject-predicate in Chinese is reversed. He also treated sentences (6)-(9) as containing ‘inverted subjects’ (Chao 1968:323, 673-674), regarding grammatical objects in these sentences as logical subjects.

6) Xia yu le.
   fall rain ASP
   ‘It is raining.’

7) Lai le san zhi da gou.
   come ASP three CL big dog
   ‘There came three big dogs.’

8) Pao diao le liang ge zei.
   run away ASP two CL thief
   ‘There ran away two thieves.’

9) Qiang-shang gua zhe yi fu hua.
   wall-top hang ASP one CL picture
   ‘On the wall hangs a picture.’
Therefore, sentences like (6) through (9) have been taken as inverted sentences. In the same vein, existential sentences exemplified by (10) have also been regarded as inverted sentences.

10) Zhuozi-shang you yi ben shu.
    table-top have one CL book
    'There is a book on the top of the table.'

While the subject is placed after the verb in sentences (6)-(10), these sentences should be distinguished from those in (1)-(3). There are at least four reasons. First, functionally speaking, these sentences are what Li and Thompson (1981:509-519) have characterized as 'presentative sentences' the function of which is to introduce an entity into discourse. Therefore, the 'inverted subjects' are indefinite. Second, these indefinite nouns must immediately follow the verbs introducing them. Third, only some verbs may occur in the presentative construction exemplified by these sentences. These verbs fall into a class of verbs can be characterized as 'ergative verbs' in GB theory or 'unaccusative verbs' in relational grammar. Fourth, while sentences with inverted subjects, as in (1) to (3), occur almost exclusively in informal, spontaneous conversations, presentative sentences such as (6) to (9) occur in both formal Chinese and informal, Beijing conversations.

Apart from the presentative sentences with ergative verbs, inverted sentences such (1)-(5) should also be distinguished from conventionalized inverted sentences such as (11) and (12).

11) De-le ba, ni
    Enough-ASP PRT you
    'That's enough!'

12) Hao a, ni
    Good PRT you
    'How good of you! (sarcastically)'

While the subject in sentences (1) to (3) can be reversed to yield the 'normal' subject-predicate order, the subject in (11) and (12) cannot be. To reverse predicate-subject order in (11) would result in an odd sentence for native speakers of Beijing Mandarin. (12) is not a reverse order of the most popular greeting sentence Ni hao a 'How are you?;' (12) is a sarcastic expression used to reproach someone for a wrongdoing. Similarly, (13) should also not be treated on an equal footing with (4) and (5).
While the inverted auxiliary and adverb in (4) and (5) can be reverted back to their normal preverbal position, that is not possible the adverb 'dou' 'already' in (13). Sentence (13) is a conventionalized expression for speakers of Beijing Mandarin to ask for the time.

The class of inverted sentences to be analyzed in this study will be restricted to sentences like (1) through (5), where an element which would be in preverbal position in formal Chinese word order is placed at the end of a sentence in conversational discourse. Presentative sentences such as (6) to (10) and conventionalized inverted sentences such as (11) to (13) are excluded from the present study for the reasons stated above. Also to be excluded from the present study are sentences such as (14) and (15), in which the subject is repeated at the end of a sentence, as well as sentences such as (16) and (17), which exhibit 'right dislocation'.

14) Ni jinlai ba, ni. you enter-come PRT you 'You come in! You!'

15) Ta liushijiu sui le, ta. he sixty-nine year ASP he 'He is already sixty-nine years old, he.'

16) Ta taoyan wo, ni de fuqin. he dislike I you PRT father 'He dislikes me, your father.'

17) Tingshuo ta qu Meiguo le, Xumin. hear-of he go U.S.A ASP, Xumin 'I hear that he has gone to the United States, Xumin.'

Although sentences with a repeated or 'dislocated' element at the end are closely related to the class of inverted sentences to be treated in both function and structure, they are excluded in order to further restrict the scope of the present study.
Inverted sentences like (1)-(5) permeate daily conversations in Beijing Mandarin. In contrast, they rarely occur in formal spoken and written Chinese. To understand this contrast, it is not only desirable but also necessary to identify some of the essential functional and organizational characteristics which distinguish naturally occurring conversations from formal spoken language such as found in lectures and public speeches, and in formal writings such as academic papers and newspaper editorials.

Conversation is constructed through social interaction, and is itself a form of social interaction. In conversation, human beings utilize language to make inquiries for information, to make requests, to negotiate, to react to different speech acts and social actions (Geis 1989), and to 'create the self' through the eyes of other participants (Mead 1962). To be efficient and effective in conversation, participants must follow a set of cooperative principles, such as those identified by Grice (1975). The nature of conversation as social interaction thus requires that participants of a conversation coordinate with each other not only in choice of topics and in turn-taking but also in language use at the semantic and syntactic levels (Clark 1985). Speakers participating in a conversation have to select the most appropriate linguistic structures in order to communicate their intents to their listeners. For example, studies of the information structure of sentences indicate that speakers tend to begin with the most salient information and progress toward less salient information (Firbas 1964; Halliday 1967; Prince 1981). While various types of discourse often exhibit this tendency, it is especially true of conversational discourse. Thus, in Beijing conversational discourse, speakers often put at the very beginning of their turn in a conversation the linguistic unit carrying the most relevant and salient information. This will be illustrated in section 4.1. We will refer to this linguistic mechanism as thematization, a mechanism which yields the majority of inverted sentences in naturally occurring conversations in Beijing Mandarin.

The pioneering works on conversation analysis by a group of sociologists, also known as ethnomethodologists (chiefly Sack, Schegloff and Jefferson), have revealed that conversation has an elaborate and detailed architecture, far from being a collection of randomly uttered sentences by interlocutors. The fact that conversation is orderly should not come as a surprise, since conversationalists have to coordinate their joint productions of meanings and actions (Schiffrin 1988). The specific organization of a conversation may vary according to different types of conversations in different languages and cultures. Nonetheless, based on our observation that turn-taking in Beijing
conversations is done with minimal break and minimal overlap, it stands to reason to assume that a conversation in Beijing Mandarin, like in English, is typically characterized by two closely related organizational strategies, turn-taking and adjacency-pairs. The former refers to the A-B-A-B-A-B distribution of talk across two participants in a dialogue, whereas the latter refers to paired utterances such as question-answer, greeting-greeting, offer-acceptance, apology-minimization, and the like (Levinson 1983). In Sack, Schegloff and Jefferson’s (1974) framework of conversational analysis, these two organizational mechanisms constitute the local management system in a conversation.

Central to Sack et al.’s theory of local management system is the notion of transition relevance place. Transition relevance places are defined both intonationally and syntactically as possible completion points in a current speaker’s turn for current speaker to allow turn-taking by the next speaker or for the current speaker to continue. In naturally occurring conversations in Beijing Mandarin, inverted sentences signal transition relevance places more clearly than non-inverted sentences for both intonational and syntactic reasons. Syntactically, an inverted sentence can signal a turn unit more definitively than a sentence in normal order. Compared with inverted sentences, sentences in normal order are relatively prone to be continued by other sentences in the thought flow. Intonationally, inverted sentences, often with sentence final particles preceeding the postposed element, yield an intonation different from that of non-inverted sentences, at least impressionistically. It is this difference that may have induced linguists who are also native speakers to transcribe the inverted sentences with a comma before the postposed element. Thus, there is a basis for us to propose that inverted sentences in Beijing Mandarin are motivated by turn-taking, with the occurrence of adjacency pairs and transitional relevance places in conversations.

Naturally occurring conversations are impromptu and unplanned. They are liable to communicative breakdown and repair due to mishearings and misunderstandings. Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks (1977) have distinguished four types of repair according to who initiates and who carries out the repair. These are: self-initiated self-repair, other-initiated self-repair, self-initiated other-repair, and other-initiated other-repair. Some of the inverted sentences in Beijing Mandarin appear to have resulted from repair, especially self-initiated self-repair.

As has been observed by Chafe (1979,1982) and others, spontaneous language is produced in spurts, called idea units, with mean length of
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approximately two seconds or approximately six words each. According to Chafe (1982: 37), 'idea units typically have a coherent intonation contour, they are typically bounded by pauses, and they usually exhibit one of a small set of syntactic structure.' From this point of view, inverted sentences in Beijing daily conversations can be regarded as a juxtaposition of two idea units. On the one hand, the tendency to put the most salient and relevant idea units at the very beginning of a speaker's current turn results in thematization. On the other hand, supplementary idea units can be added as afterthoughts before the current turn is over. Therefore, some of inverted sentences can be regarded as having resulted from afterthought addition.

3. DATA BASE

Our data base for conversational discourse is composed of independently collected recordings of natural face-to-face conversations in daily speech in Beijing. The data used for analysis and discussion in Section 4 are extracted from the corpus of these recordings. We have also incorporated patterns of inverted sentences collected by Chen Jianmin (1982) and Lu Jianming (1980) from daily speech in Beijing into the list of patterns documented in Section 5.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

From our data base, one overall generalization is observed regarding word order flexibility in Beijing conversational Chinese versus formal Chinese, namely, word order is freer in the former case. In contrast to grammatical sentences in formal Chinese, which requires the subject to be placed before its predicate and various types of adverbs before the verb, sentences in Beijing conversational discourse allow adverbs and subjects—sometimes together with adverbs or main verbs—to be placed at the end of a sentence. Thus, sentences (18) to (21) below, only the (a) order is permitted in formal Chinese: while both (a) and (b) orders are possible in conversational discourse.

18a) Zheige bu keneng.
   This NEG possible
   Subject Predicate
   'This is impossible.'

b) Bu keneng, zheige.
19a) Xianzai di shui dou bu neng jin le.
Now drop water even NEG able enter ASP
Adverb Subject Predicate
'I cannot drink even one drop of water now.'

b) Di shui dou bu neng jing le, xianzai.

20a) Nin you zhao shenme?
You again look-for what
Subj Adv Verb Object
'What are you looking for again?'

b) Zhao shenme, nin you.

21a) Ni xiang ban sha bu sha ba?
You think half automatic NEG automatic PRT
Subj Verb Subordinate Clause
'(So) you know that it is a semi-automatic camera?'

b) Ban sha bu sha ba, ni xiang?

The fact that both (a) and (b) orders are permitted in Beijing conversational discourse does not mean that ordering of constituents there is random and free. In the following sections, we will show that the (b) order is well motivated by speakers’ efforts to meet cooperative principles and local management systems in conversation. Three primary motivations can be identified: thematization, repair, and afterthought. They are discussed and illustrated respectively in sections 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.

4.1 Thematization

As explicated in 2.2, conversation is produced in a full range of interactive contexts, linguistic as well as non-linguistic. The speaker has access to quick feedback from the context, but at the same time he is pressured by the need to compete with other speakers to take the next turn in conversation, and by the limited time available to him. To cope, the speaker actively adopts all kinds of linguistic and paralinguistic devices to drive home his intended meaning efficiently. One of the most important linguistic devices employed is word order. The starting point of a sentence is extremely important in the organization of the information the speaker intends to convey. Brown and Yule (1983), as well as Traugott and Pratt (1980), recognize this starting point as the theme. The theme of a sentence can be any part of speech or syntactic
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constituent. Thus, the process of **thematization** is to organize the information structure by making a certain constituent of the sentence its theme. Through thematization, a certain sentential constituent, instead of being at its usual position in formal Chinese, is placed at the sentence-initial position as the theme of the sentence.

The following three excerpts reveal how inverted sentence occurs as a result of thematization in the conversational discourse. An inverted sentence is indicated by a right arrow (-->). Excerpt (22) is a dialogue produced at the dinner table, towards the end of the meal.

22) A: Wo bu chi le, aiya bu xing le.
   'I will not eat, I cannot (eat any more).' 

   B: Xihongshi dou bu xing le?
   Tomato even NEG able ASP
   'Not even a tomato?'

   A: Di shui dou bu neng jin.
   Drop water even NEG able enter
   '(I) cannot drink even one drop of water.' 

   B: Zhe shuiguor.
   This fruit
   'This is fruit.' 

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   A: Di shui dou bu neng jin le, xianzai.
   Drop water even NEG able enter ASP now
   '(I) cannot take even one drop of water now.' 

   B: Di shui dou bu neng jin?
   Drop water even NEG able enter
   '(You) really cannot take any more?' 

   A: A.
   Yes

At the beginning of the excerpt, A is full and declines to accept any more food. However, as a common practice in China, to be polite, the host usually asks the guest to have more. Thus, in the above excerpt, this particular social action of courtesy is performed by an interrogative sentence, in which B
suggests to A to eat a tomato. After A’s initial negative response and B’s further attempt to persuade him, A declines again, repeating his previous response as confirmation of his inability to eat any more. But this time, the response is made with an additional time reference, xianzai ‘now.’ Di shui dou bu neng jin le ‘can not take even one drop of water’ now becomes the theme, and is placed at the beginning of the sentence. The time reference, xianzai ‘now,’ which is less salient than the theme, is then placed at the end of the sentence, resulting in an inverted sentence.

The thematic function of an inverted sentence can be further illustrated by excerpt (23). It is taken from a conversation between a couple concerning child-rearing.

23) A: You de haizi faner chikui chi duo le
Have PRT child CONJ suffer-lose suffer more ASP
‘There are some children who, just because they suffered

yihou fan’er, fan’er neng ziji duanlian chulai.
afterwards CONJ CONJ able self develop out
a lot, have themselves developed the ability to survive.’

B: A, shi zheyang. Wo you zhe ganjue.
PRT be this I have this feeling
‘That is true. I have the same feeling.’

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Ai, bu keneng, zheige.
PRT NEG possible this
‘This is impossible.’

Ni lao ding zhe genben jiu bu keneng.
You always watch PRT absolute just NEG possible
‘It is impossible to always keep an eye on (him).’

In the above conversation, speaker B produces an inverted sentence when he forms his conclusion. Speaker B’s intent to emphasize his conclusion of bu keneng ‘impossible’ is obvious in this example. It is not only thematized in the inverted sentence but also repeated in the sentence immediately following the inverted sentence. This particular example thus provides another evidence that some inverted sentences resulted from thematization.
The third and last example of inverted sentences due to thematization is excerpt (24). A conversation produced at a party of close friends when three people are talking about a newly purchased semi-automatic camera.

24) A: Zhe shi, zhe, zhe, xiangji shi ban sha bu sha. 
   This be this this camera be half automatic NEG automatic 
   'This camera is semi-automatic.'

   B: Ban sha. 
   Half automatic 
   '(It is) semi-automatic.'

   C: Ban sha bu sha ba, ni xiang. 
   Half automatic NEG automatic PRT you think 
   '(It is) semi-automatic, you know.'

   B: Ban sha bu sha. 
   Half automatic NEG automatic 
   '(It is) semi-automatic.'

Of the four turns, only A's utterance gives new information. The rest of the utterances by B and C are mere echo-responses of what A has already said. These echo-responses, however, are important in terms of social interactions in that they function to indicate the active participation of B and C in the conversation and the attention they paid to A's speech. Thus, the repetition of the key information provided by A, ban sha bu sha 'semi-automatic' makes the conversation a close-knit and cohesive unit. Since the key information about the qualitative characteristics of the camera is 'semi-automatic,' it is desirable for the sake of social interaction for B and C to echo 'semi-automatic' and thus to make the information of 'semi-automatic' salient enough so that their responses will be responsive to the need of cooperation in conversation. In this respect, B and C have done differently. B's first utterance is only a fragment of A's phrase ban sha bu sha 'semi-automatic,' his second utterance repeats the full phrase. C, on the other hand, produces an inverted sentence by adding the expression ni xiang 'you think' after the thematic message, ban sha bu sha. In order to keep his speech relevant and cohesive to what is under discussion, C places the thematic message before 'you think,' which would normally occur at the sentence-initial position in formal Chinese.
4.2 Repair

In naturally occurring speech activities, a speaker can often be impeded from articulating a smooth flow of thoughts and ideas because of unexpected situations and topics, the pressure of the interactive environment, and the general challenge of the 'linearization' problem (Brown and Yule 1983). As Schegloff (1979:269) has put it, 'the exchange of talk is indigenously and exogenously vulnerable to trouble that can arise at any time.' At any time in conversation, the speaker may find what he has just spoken is somehow inaccurate, incorrect, or incomprehensible to the hearer. Due to the linear property of speech in time, the speaker, as a rule, does not redo what has already been uttered but rather repair his speech after the utterance of it.9 Thus, repair is a necessary means for speakers to convey information in conversation. Although there are different types of repair (as noted in 2.2), our data show that the self-initiated repair is the one which triggers inverted sentences. A sentence may serve as a turn-construction unit, with the end of the sentence functioning as a transition relevance place, a place where a transition to the next speaker may take place. Therefore, to keep the intended repair relevant, the end of a sentence is a natural place for self-initiated repairs. The following excerpt from our corpus gives a good example of repair at the end of a sentence.

25) A: Ai, hai you yi jin duo ne ba. PR T still exist one catty more PRT PRT ‘There is still (perhaps) more than one catty (left).’

B: Shenme ya! What PRT ‘What!’

C: Jiangjin er jin. nearly two catty ‘That is nearly two catties.’

B: Jiangjin er jin. nearly two catty ‘It is nearly two catties.’

Ai. Shang-hui cheng de shi yi jin ling diar, PR T last time weigh PRT be one catty (and) little ‘Last time the weight was a little more than one catty,’
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--- > yi jin er liang ba yejiu ...
one catty two tael PRT only
'It's perhaps only one catty and two taels.'

In B’s second turn in (25), the last utterance forms a complete repair of the message, er jin ‘two catties,’ given in the first utterance beginning this turn. Initiation of the repair is indicated by the discourse marker ai in the second utterance, which shows B’s doubt about the information just offered. The second utterance thus serves as the first step of the repair. The speaker at this moment is still not very sure about the actual weight. But he quickly provides a more exact estimation of the weight in the utterance, which is produced in an inverted order. It is clear that for a final estimation of the weight in this situation, nothing can be more important than the weight itself. Therefore it is only natural for it to be the focal point in the whole sentence. One can see that the inverted sentence has made the effect of the final estimation, ‘one catty and two taels,’ even stronger and salient by placing the constituent bearing such message immediately after the previous estimation of ‘a little more than one catty.’

Repairs often leave some impact on the syntactic structure of the sentence containing the repaired target, especially when repairs occur within a sentence. Schegloff (1979:263) notices that ‘the occurrence of repair in a sentence can have consequences for the shape of the sentence and for the ordering of its elements beyond the consequence embodied by the sheer inclusion of the repair elements.’ Consider,

26) A: Mei yue jiao shiwu, shiji kuai qian.
Each month pay fifteen ten-some dollar money
‘Each week (we) pay fifteen, ten-odd dollars.’

Shia, mei xueqi jiao shiji kuai qian.
Be PRT each term pay ten-some dollar money
‘That is, each school term (we) pay ten-odd dollars.’

--- > B: Diyi xueqi jiao shiwu kuai qian,
First term submit fifteen dollar money
‘The first school term needs fifteen dollars,
lian shu, lian shu.
including book including book
including books, including books.’
A: Zhei bu qingchu. This NEG clear '(I) am not clear about that.'

In (26), the right-most elements of the inverted sentence, lian shu 'including books' are placed at the end of B's utterance. Speaker B initiated the repair when she found that some important information was missing in the previous portion of her utterance. Clearly, in this case, the intent of repair by the speaker is conveyed by the repetition of the same repair elements, lian shu in the same utterance. Through the repetition, the information focus of the entire utterance at this moment is shifted to this part of the sentence, and the intended clarification is achieved. This self-initiated repair results in an inverted sentence, since the position for lian shu would be before the verb jiao 'pay' in formal Chinese.

We attribute the inverted sentence in (26) to repair because the inverted constituent lian shu is repeated as a crucial message without which the misinformation cannot be clarified. Afterthought appendage (discussed in 4.3), on the other hand, carries supplementary information which can be omitted without causing misunderstanding. We have thus treated (26) as a case of repair rather than afterthought.

4.3 Afterthought Appendage

Under the pressure of turn-taking and time limitation, the speaker has to organize his conversation in the most efficient and effective way. Therefore, the speaker strives to utter what he deems to be the most salient and relevant message first, as in the case of thematization. However, before the current turn is over or the next turn is taken, he may have the time to add some supplementary information to further qualify any part of the message just conveyed. For supplementary information to be relevant, it is best for the speaker to put the added information before the current turn is over. We can refer to the idea unit carrying supplementary information as afterthought appendage. An afterthought appendage has to be uttered immediately following what is previously uttered without any interruption. Since the end of a sentence is the place where the current turn might terminate, the end is the most likely location for the speaker to place afterthought appendage. Thus, the speaker not only keeps his speech as a cohesive whole, but also clears his way for the next turn, even if no one actually takes the next turn. As
a result, afterthought appendage gives rise to inverted sentences on the surface.

Afterthought appendage does not carry essential information and its omission would not lead to munsunderstanding or misinformation. In contrast, repair elements serve to correct a piece of information just given in order to prevent misunderstanding or misinformation, as we have seen in (26) in the previous subsection.

Since the end of a sentence is a relevant transition place where the current turn might end, it is the most desirable location for afterthought appendage, especially after the completion of a sentence and before the current turn is over. Thus, without afterthought appendage, a sentence is still complete with all the necessary information. In terms of syntactic constituents, afterthought appendages often coincide with auxiliaries and adverbial adjuncts, the omission of which would still yield complete sentences. For example, consider the inverted sentence uttered by speaker C in (27).

27) A: Ershi fenzhong you le. twenty minutes have PRT ‘It has already taken twenty minutes.’

--- > C: Yigong tamen shi liu ge ren (PAUSE), yinggai. total they be six CL person (PAUSE), should ‘There are six of them altogether ... (or) should be.’

D: Ao, mei ge ren dou gen nin shuohua lai-zhe? Oh, each CL person all to you speak come-ASP ‘Has each one of them talked to you?’

After speaker C has produced the first part of her utterance, ‘There are six of them altogether,’ she realizes that she is not very sure of the number of people. Therefore she immediately adds a qualifying expression in the form of an auxiliary yinggai ‘should,’ making the total number more tentative. The pause before the auxiliary further reveals the appendage status of the auxiliary. In formal Chinese, the auxiliary yinggai, occurs between the subject and the verb. Here, it is attached to the end of the sentence, creating an inverted sentence.

Another example of inverted sentences is given in (28) below.
(28) A: Xiao Li shang menkou lai le.  
Xiao Li up doorway come ASP  
'Xiao Li comes to the doorway.'

B: Shi ma?  
Be PRT  
'Is (that) true?'

A: Hmm.  
Hmm.

--- > C: Zuotian zhongwu shui zhiban ya (PAUSE),  
Yesterday noon who on-duty PRT  
'Who was on duty yesterday noon,'  
wo gei ni da dianhua shi.  
I to you make call when  
when I called you?'

A: Ni gen renjia heng lai-zhe a?  
You to somebody harsh come-ASP PRT  
'Were you harsh to that person?'

C: Wo mei gen renjia heng a.  
I NEG to somebody harsh PRT  
'I was not.'

In (28), an inverted sentence is produced by speaker C in a dialogue among speakers A, B and C about an event that had occurred the day before when C called A. In this conversation, C tries to find out who was on duty and answered the telephone at the time when she called. C's utterance we have here is her very first one in the conversation and the first part of it is produced in a very direct way without an opening section. This shows that this particular question was already in her mind for sometime, and at the moment of speaking, the question is the first thing in her mind. As a matter of fact, the main purpose for C to come here is to ask the question to find out who that person on duty was. Immediately after she has asked the question, she further qualifies the time zuotian zhongwu 'yesterday noon' by adding the adverbial time clause, wo gen ni da dianhua shi 'when I called you' to further pinpoint the time. In formal Chinese, the adverbial clause is placed before the main clause. In (28), this would be right after the time expression, zuotian zhongwu 'yesterday noon,' and before shui 'who.' The adverbial clause in
(28) is appended instead, yielding an inverted sentence. As in (27), the afterthought appendage in (28) is indicated by a noticeable pause between the previously uttered part and the appended part. It is worth noting that impressionistically, the pause before afterthought appendages appears to be longer and more conspicuous than that before inverted elements due to thematization or repair.

5. CONCLUSION

We have identified three motivations for the occurrence of inverted sentences in Beijing conversations: thematization, repair, and afterthought appendage. We do not claim that the patterns are exhaustive, or the motivations definitive. We recognize that there may be fuzzy boundaries among the three motivations. Nonetheless, the present study represents the first serious attempt to explain the occurrence of inverted sentences in Beijing conversational discourse in terms of conversation structure uncovered by conversation analysts. In particular, we made use of those structural aspects referred to as local management systems, namely, turn-taking, adjacency pair, and repair. Having shown that these local management systems are valuable in explaining the motivations for the occurrence of inverted sentences in Beijing conversational discourse, it is reasonable to assume that these local management systems have a universal basis, even though they are extrapolated mainly from the analysis of English conversation.

From the outset, we have noted that inverted sentences in Beijing conversational discourse are generally absent in formal Chinese. The disparity can be understood in terms of fundamental differences between spontaneous spoken language and composed written language, since formal language, even in spoken form, is largely based on composed written language. As pointed out by Chafe (1982), while spontaneous spoken language is produced in idea units and thus tends to be 'fragmented,' composed written language molds a succession of idea units into a single complex sentence and thus tends to be 'integrated.' Chafe has attributed this difference to a tandem arrangement between the abnormal quickness of reading and the abnormal slowness of writing. From this point of view, inverted sentences in this study can be regarded as consisting of two idea units spontaneously produced in conversation. Their general absence in formal Chinese is due to the more 'integrated' quality of composed written Chinese, which propels the need to concatenate a series of idea units in conventionalized Chinese word order. If our interpretation is correct, then it is probable that inverted sentences also
occur, to varying degrees, in spontaneous conversations in other Chinese dialects and other languages.

Inverted sentences abound in daily conversations in Beijing Mandarin, and they are genuinely natural sentences, despite their general absence in formal Chinese. The term 'inverted' should be taken as a purely descriptive nomenclature without implying the abnormality of this type of sentences. So should the term 'fragmented.' It is unfortunate that inverted sentences such as those in our study are often neglected in the construction of Chinese grammar. This is particularly true in many theory-oriented studies of Chinese grammar in the past as well as currently. Given their naturalness in daily conversations, inverted sentences should not be treated as marginal sentences, as they have been. They should play a more important role in the study of word order in Chinese. After all, conversation is a more basic mode of communication than other forms of linguistic communication, and can serve as a base for the description of other types of discourse (Fillmore 1981). Current theories of Chinese word order based on formal Chinese would be very different, if the inverted sentences discussed in this paper were used as the vantage point for analyzing word order. By the same token, if word order patterns in naturally occurring conversations across languages were used to construct general theories of word order in natural languages, we would arrive at very different conclusions on universal grammar with respect to both word order and grammatical structures. It is our hope that the study of inverted sentences in Beijing conversational discourse will shed some light on the nature of word order in Chinese and other languages.

NOTES

* This is a much revised version of our paper presented at the 20th University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Linguistic Symposium--Word Order in Discourse, April 12-14, 1991. We have also presented a version of this paper on October 19, 1991 at a Chinese sociolinguistics workshop held at The Ohio State University. We benefited from questions and comments from the audience. We are grateful to Robert Sanders for sharing with us some of his transcribed data from recordings of naturally occurring conversations in Beijing. We are also grateful to Marjorie Chan, who has read the manuscript and made valuable comments and suggestions. We are, of course, solely responsible for any possible errors.

1. Lectures, speeches, news broadcasts, and the like are typically delivered in formal spoken Chinese, which is highly influenced by formal written Chinese.
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In the literature on discourse analysis, comparison between written and spoken language is often made with respect to their grammatical differences (cf. Brown and Yule 1983). However, as correctly pointed out by Tannen (1984), this kind of comparison mostly involves the comparison between spoken conversation and written expository prose, which typically does not include narrative. Tannen has shown that the narrative genre is primarily a spoken one and written narrative borrows many conventions from oral storytelling. Furthermore, as shown by Chafe (1982), a language which has no written tradition may have different styles which in some way parallel the differences between spoken and written language. In this paper, we have therefore chosen the distinction between formal and informal language in terms of styles. As a matter of fact, the class of inverted sentences to be dealt with in this study also occur in Beijing oral and written narratives, though to a much lesser extent than in Beijing daily conversations.

2. Fortunately, the monumental work by Chao (1968) on the grammar of spoken Chinese records many features of spoken Beijing Mandarin of middle of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the inverted sentences to be dealt with in this study are described only very briefly in one paragraph in Chao (1968:69). This kind of sentences has also been studied by Chen (1982), Lu (1980), Meng (1982), and Packard (1986) from the point of view of sentence grammar.

3. Example 3 is taken from Chao (1968:69). The others are from Chen (1982) and our own data base. Chao uses the term 'inverted sentences' to refer to sentences with inverted subjects such as sentences (1) to (3). We have adopted the term to include sentences, such as (4) and (5), with postposed auxiliaries, adverbs, and other elements that would occur only preverbally in formal Chinese. On the other hand, certain types of sentences with 'inverted' subjects, discussed in section 2.1, are excluded from the class of 'inverted sentences' to be treated in the present study.

4. See Huang (1987), Li (1990), and Zhou (1990) for the application of the ergative hypothesis in GB to this type of inverted sentences.

5. We have adopted this term from transformational grammar. Instead of being simply inverted, the subject is 'dislocated' to the right leaving a resumptive pronoun behind. See Radford (1988:530-533) for an introduction to the term 'dislocation.'

6. For practical purposes, we have presented our data in Pinyin, the official romanization system of the People's Republic of China. We have not adopted
The transcription conventions employed by conversation analysts since the familiar Pinyin romanization system is adequate for the purpose of the present study on inverted sentences.

7. For a comprehensive description of adverbial placement in formal Chinese, see Li and Thompson (1981: 319-355).

8. Traugott and Pratt (1980: 283) also point out that in ordering of words, the first element in surface structure functions as the 'point of departure' of the message, and this point of departure is the theme of the sentence.

9. Comparatively speaking, repairs occur more frequently in conversation than in narrative. This is because, in daily conversation, participants are unlikely to be fully prepared for all sorts of possible topics, and are subject to unexpected situations posed by other participants or the ever-changing conversational contexts.

10. One catty equals 16 taels.


APPENDIX: PATTERNS OF INVERTED SENTENCES IN BEIJING CONVERSATIONS

Based on our own data base and incorporating the findings by Chen (1982) and Lu (1980), we have identified the following recurrent patterns of inverted sentences in Beijing daily conversations. Each of the patterns of inversion is illustrated with examples actually found in Beijing conversational discourse.

A. NP VP = = = = = VP NP

1a) Putao suan bu suan?
    Grape sour not sour
    'Are the grapes sour?'

b) Suan bu suan, putao?
    Sour not sour, grape
2a) Gang mai de shi shenme?
Just-now buy PRT be what
'What did you buy just now?'

b) Shi shenme, gang mai de?
Be what, just-now buy PRT

3a) Li xiansheng bashiliu le.
Li mister eighty-six PRT
'Mr. Li is eighty-six.'

b) Bashiliu le, Li xiansheng.
Eighty-six PRT Li mister

4a) Ta shuohua dafang.
She speak unaffected
'She speaks naturally and unaffectedly.'

b) Shuohua dafang, ta.
Speak unaffected, she.

5a) Gua nanfeng bu yaojin.
Blow south-wind not matter
'If south wind blows, it does not matter.'

b) Bu yaojin, gua nanfeng.
Not matter, blow south-wind

6a) Ta jinshi kanshu kan de.
He shortsighted read-book read PRT
'He is shortsighted from reading.'

b) Kanshu kan de, ta jinshi.
Read-book read PRT, he shortsighted

7a) Ni rang wo lai duoyu.
You ask me come unnecessary
'It is unnecessary for you to ask me to come.'

b) Duoyu, ni rang wo lai.
Unnecessary, you ask me come
B. NP1 shi NP2 = === = NP2 NP1 shi

1a) Nimen shi shenme danwei?
   You be what unit
   'Where do you work?'

b) Shenme danwei, nimen shi?
   What unit, you be

2a) Zhe shi qiaokeli.
   This be chocolate.
   'This is chocolate.'

b) Qiaokeli, zhe shi.
   Chocolate, this be

C. (NP) Aux VP = === (NP) VP Aux

1a) Ni yao chi shenme?
   You want eat what
   'What do you want to eat?'

b) Ni chi shenme, yao?
   You eat what, want

D. (NP) Aux VP = === VP (NP) Aux

1a) Ta hui gan shenme?
   He can do what
   'What can he do?'

b) Gan shenme, ta hui?
   Do what, he can

E. (NP) Adv VP = === (NP) VP Adv

1a) Ta laoshi dou ni.
   He always tease you
   'He is always teasing you.'

b) Ta dou ni, laoshi.
   He tease you, always
2a) Che manman de kai le.  
Car slowly PRT move PRT  
'The car moved slowly.'

b) Che kai le, manman de.  
Car move PRT slowly PRT

3a) Xiaomimi de kan-le yi yan.  
Smile PRT look-ASP a look  
'Smiling (He) cast a glance.'

b) Kan-le yi yan, xiaomimi de.  
Look-ASP a look, smile PRT

F.  
NP Adv VP = == == VP NP Adv

1a) Nin you zhao shenme ne?  
You again look-for what PRT  
'What are you looking for again?'

b) Zhao shenme ne, nin you?  
Look-for what PRT, you again

2a) Zhe dou na you gongfu ya!  
This even where have time PRT  
'Where on earth can I find the time!'

b) Na you gongfu ya, zhe dou!  
Where have time PRT, this even

The following two patterns conventionally have been treated as involving topicalization. However, they can also be considered as inverted sentences through thematization.

G.  
(NP1) VP NP2 = == == NP2 (NP1) VP

1a) Wo yao mai xiangchang.  
I want buy sausage  
'I want to buy some sausage.'
b) Xiangchang, wo yao mai.
Sausage, I want buy

2a) He diar pijiu ba.
Drink some beer PRT
've have some beer!'

b) Pijiu ba, he diar.
Beer PRT, drink some.

H. (NP) V S’ === S’ (NP) V

1a) Wo zhunbei bu hui jia le.
I plan not go home PRT
'I do not plan to go home.'

b) Bu hui jia le, wo zhunbei.
Not go home PRT, I plan

2a) Wo juede jintian bijiao leng.
I feel today comparatively cold
'I feel that it is kind of cold today.'

b) Jintian bijiao leng, wo juede.
Today comparatively cold, I feel

I. NP VP1 VP2 === NP VP2 VP1

1a) Wo gu inu lai jia ku ya.
I daughter come home cry PRT
'My daughter came home and cried.'

b) Wo gu inu ku ya, lai jia.
I daughter cry PRT, come home

2a) Lao Li ti-zhe xingli zhang-zhe.
Lao Li lift-ASP luggage stand-ASP
'Lao Li is standing (there) with luggage in his hand.'

b) Lao Li zhang-zhe, ti-zhe xingli
Lao Li stand-ASP, lift-ASP luggage
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3a) Ta dai-le haizi qu gongyuan le.
   She take-ASP child go park PRT
   'She took her child to the park.'

   b) Ta qu gongyuan le, dai-le haizi.
      She go park PRT, take-ASP child

J. (NP) VP1 VP2 VP3 ===== (NP) VP1 VP3 VP2

1a) Mama dai wo shang yiyuan qiao qu.
    Mother take me go hospital see go
    'Mother will take me to the hospital to see (a doctor).'

   b) Mama dai wo qiao qu, shang yiyuan.
      Mother take me see go, go hospital

K. (NP1) VP1 NP2 VP2 ===== VP2 (NP1) VP1 NP2

1a) Ni qing tamen dou huiqu ba.
    You ask them all return PRT
    'Ask them all to go back.'

   b) Dou huiqu ba, ni qing tamen.
      All return PRT, you ask them

2a) Qing tamen deng yi xia.
    Ask them wait a while
    'Ask them to wait a minute.'

   b) Deng yi xia, qing tamen.
      Wait a while, ask them

L. (NP1) VP1 NP2 VP2 VP3 ===== VP2 VP3 (NP1) VP1 NP2

1a) Ma jiao ni fang-le xue mashang hui jia.
    Mother ask you close-ASP school at-once return home
    'Mother asked you to go home immediately after school.'

   b) Fang-le xue mashang hui jia, ma jiao ni.
      Close-ASP school at-once return home, mother ask you

M. (NP1) VP1 NP2 VP2 VP3 ===== (NP1) VP1 NP2 VP3 VP2
1a) Jiao ni xia-le ban qu gugu jia.
   Ask you get-off-ASP work go aunt home
   '(Someone) asked you to go to aunt’s home after work.'

   b) Jiao ni qu gugu jia, xia-le ban.
   Ask you go aunt home, get-off-ASP work

N. (NP₁) VP₁ NP₂ VP₂ VP₃
   (NP₁) VP₃ (NP₁) VP₁ NP₂ VP₂

1a) Qing wo ban ta xiuxiu shouyinji.
   Ask me help him fix radio
   '(Someone) asked me to fix the radio for him.'

   b) Xiuxiu shouyinji, qing wo bang ta.
   Fix radio, ask me help him

In the following pattern, the prepositional phrase functions as adverbial.

O. (NP) PP VP = = = = (NP) VP PP

1a) Ta cong wushi niandai qi dang fanyi.
   She from fifty decade on act translator
   'She has been a translator since the fifties.'

   b) Ta dang fanyi, cong wushi niandai qi.
   She act translator, from fifty decade on

2a) Ta zheng zai jia da dianhua ne.
   He right-now at home make phone-call PRT
   'He is making a phone call at home right now.'

   b) Ta zheng da dianhua ne, zai jia.
   He right-now make phone-call PRT, at home

3a) Ta dui wo hen keqi.
   He to me very polite
   'His is very polite to me.'

   b) Ta hen keqi, dui wo.
   He very polite, to me
FUNCTIONAL MOTIVATIONS FOR ...

4a) Ni gei wo gun ba!
   You for me get-out PRT
   'You get out of here!'

   b) Ni gun ba, gei wo!
      You get-out PRT, for me

P. (NP₁) BA NP₂ VP ==== (NP₁) VP BA NP₂

1a) Ba piao si-le!
    BA ticket tear-off-ASP
    'Tear off the ticket!'

   b) Si-le, ba piao!
      Tear-off-ASP, BA ticket

Q. Adverbial Phrase S ==== S Adverbial phrase

1a) Zhao li shuo, yinggai zhao ta liaoliao.
    According-to reason say, should find him talk
    '(We) ought to go and talk to him.'

   b) Yinggaizhao ta liaoliao, zhao li shuo.
      Should find him talk, according-to reason say

2a) Shuo shizai de, shui lao zhaoxiang ya?
    Say truth PRT, who always take-picture PRT
    'To tell the truth, who takes pictures all the time?'

   b) Shui lao zhaoxiang ya, shuo shizai de?
      Who always take-picture PRT, say truth Part

3a) Zhao wo kan, ni bu yao huixin.
    According-to I see, you NEG want be discouraged
    'The way I see it, you should not be discouraged.'

   b) Ni bu yao huixin, zhao wo kan.
      You not want be discouraged, according-to I see
The patterns in this appendix represent all the patterns we have identified so far. They may or may not be exhaustive. Based on the patterns identified, two generalizations can be made. First, every inverted sentence is composed of two strings of elements. While the first string must form a constituent, the same does not necessarily hold for the second string. And second, for every inverted pattern, there is a non-inverted equivalent which is found in formal Chinese. There are, however, idiomatic expressions which exhibit only inverted order without non-inverted equivalents. Sentences (11)-(12) in section 2.1 are some of the examples.

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