

# A Formal Experimental Study of Wh-island Effects in Chinese

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It has generally been assumed that D-linked wh-phrases can violate the island constraints without being penalized on the acceptability, in contrast to non-D-linked wh-phrases that are generally taken to be restricted by island conditions, a phenomenon known as the D-linked and non-D-linked asymmetry with respect to island effects. However, recent experimental work has demonstrated that although the complex D-linked wh-phrases can ameliorate the island effect, they cannot eliminate the island effect completely (Sprouse et al. 2016, Villata & Sprouse 2023). This study delves into this empirical contention by investigating the impact of D-linking properties on wh-island effects in Chinese. We carried out a formal acceptability judgement experiment, adopting the factorial definition of island effects (Sprouse, Wagers & Phillips 2012). The results showed that both D-linked and non-D-linked wh-in-situ exhibit the island effect, displaying no asymmetry in this respect. Furthermore, we also observed that the D-linking properties partially ameliorate the island effect. We will argue that findings from our experiment lend support for the theory of covert wh-movement (Huang 1982), rather than the unselective binding, on the interpretation of Chinese wh-in-situ. Building on Chomsky's (1995) assumption that covert wh-movement is pure wh-feature movement, we will suggest that the presence of wh-island effects, as observed in our experiment, can be attributed to the violation of locality principles during the process of wh-feature movement. Additionally, the observed pattern of wh-island effects in relation to the D-linking properties conforms to the predictions of fRM (Rizzi 2013), according to which movement of the featurally less specified non-D-linked in-situ wh-phrases (i.e., [+Q]) leads to a significant acceptability penalty, whereas movement of the featurally more specified D-linked in-situ wh-phrases (i.e., [+Q, +Top]) yields a slight acceptability enhancement, hence the amelioration effect of D-linking wh-in-situ.

## References

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