Crossover Effects in English and Chinese

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It has been known that weakest crossover examples like (2) are more acceptable than weak crossover ones like (1) (Lasnik and Stowell 1991).

(1) a. *John, his mother loves t.
   b. ?? the book, which, its author read t]
   c. *Who, does his, boss dislike t?
(2) a. John, [NO, I believe his, mother loves e.]
   b. This book, which, its author wrote t, last week, is a hit
   c. Who, did you stay with t, [before [his, wife] had spoken to e.]

Pan (2016:61) shows that weak crossover effects are also observed in Chinese topicalization like (3a). However, if the context is changed to (3b, c), no weak crossover effect occurs. On the other hand, a relative clause as in (3d) does not make it natural as in English.

(3) a. *Nà-ge xiǎohái, tā māma bù xīhuan tǐ.
    that-CL kid his mother NEG like
    'As for that kid, his, mother doesn’t like.'
   b. Zhè-ge háizi, tā fūmǔ tèbíè chǒng'ài eǐ.
    this-CL child his parent strongly love
    'As for this child, his, parents strongly love.'
   c. Zhè-ge zhěngtiān rěshǐshēngfēi de xiǎohái, tā fūmǔ cóngxǐāo
    this-CL always make trouble DE kid his parent since childhood
    jiù bù xīhuan eǐ.
    EMPH NEG like
    'As for this kid, who always makes trouble, his, parents don’t like since his childhood.’
   d. ?Nà-ge xiǎohái, wǒ juède tā māma bù xīhuan eǐ.
    that-CL kid I feel his mother NEG like
    'As for that kid, I think his, mother doesn’t like.’

This presentation will explain English and Chinese crossover effects in terms of Mental Space Theory (Fauconnier 1994, 1997) and argue that no weak crossover effect occurs (i) if the same referents are not presented in the same mental space in English, and (ii) if the Focus Space is not contradictory to its upper space in Chinese. (1) is not natural since there is only one space with two same referents "John," + "his mother loves him,"/ "the book," + "its author read it,"/ "who," + "his boss dislike him." It becomes natural if the same referents are presented in two mental spaces like (2). In (2a), an upper space contains "John," from which the Belief Space "John’s mother loves him" is accessed. In (2b), the Focus Space "this book is a hit" is structured independently of the background space "this book’s author wrote it last week". In (2c), the Base Space which contains "who" sets up both the space "his wife spoke to him" and the space "you stayed with him". That is, weak crossover effects are absent if the same elements are not put together in one space. On the other hand, when a topic is presented in Chinese, common sense usually constructs an upper space which makes the same referents shown in different mental spaces. Chinese topicalization is grammatical if the Focus Space is consistent with its upper space. When the topic is family members like in (3), a space built by common sense (implicature) "they love each other" is constructed under the Base Space "that kid”. The Focus Space “his mother doesn’t like him” is contradictory to its upper space, therefore (3a, d) is ungrammatical. (3b) is acceptable since the Focus Space “his parents strongly love him” is consistent with the upper space. Note that if a context like “the kid always makes trouble” is provided as in (3c), the implicature is contextually cancelable (Grice 1989:44) and the context constructs an upper space, which makes the Focus Space “his mother doesn’t like him” compatible with it.

References