1. Introduction: In studying the syntactic structure of Comparative Construction (CC) in Mandarin, such as (1), identifying the syntactic category of the comparative marker *bi* has often been taken as the crucial step, in which *bi* is treated as a verb (Chao 1968), a preposition/coverb (Li and Thompson 1981), or a conjunction (Hong 1991). However, this paper is based on the minimalist program trying to treat CCs as a coordinate structure with the degree word *geng* (‘more’) to be the coordinator of the two compared propositions. And the comparative marker *bi* is a complementizer taking the compared proposition to be external conjunct.

(1)  *Wo bi Zhangsan geng ai ni*

   I COM Zhangsan more love you

   ‘I love you more than Zhangsan does.’

2. Literature review:

2.1 *bi* as a verb: Previous analyses of CCs, such as Chao (1968) maintain that *bi* is a verb and thus analyze the CCs a serial verb construction. Nevertheless, as is mentioned by Hong (1991), many syntactic evidences show that *bi* is clearly not a verb. The comparative marker *bi* is just a homophone to the verb *bi*, which means ‘compete’ rather than ‘compare.’

2.2 *bi* as a conjunction: In addition, the two compared items in CCs should be parallel both semantically and syntactically, which seem to conform to the characteristics of coordinate structure (CS). Hong (1991) treats the comparative marker *bi* as a conjunction, which together with the two compared items makes a coordinate complex. The ellipsis in CCs is assumed to be similar to that in the CSs. In her study, *bi*, like many other coordinators, can connect conjuncts of any of the following categories: NP, VP, AP, PP, and S. Although the s-selection of *bi* makes the two compared items to be semantically parallel, their surface structures are usually asymmetrical, which is caused by the comparative or coordinate ellipsis. Therefore, Hong’s analysis may not apply to the sentence in (2) (Li and Thompson 1981).

(2)  a.  *Wo bi zuotian shufu*

   I COM yesterday comfortable

   ‘I feel better than I did yesterday.’

3. Analysis:

3.1 The proposed tree structure:

(3)  \[ \text{CP} \rightarrow \text{TP} \rightarrow \text{T} \rightarrow \text{DegP} \rightarrow \text{C'} \rightarrow \text{wo} \rightarrow \text{T'} \rightarrow \text{Deg'} \rightarrow \text{CP} \rightarrow \text{TP} \rightarrow \text{bi} \rightarrow \text{Deg} \rightarrow \text{geng} \rightarrow \text{vP2} \rightarrow \text{<wo>} \rightarrow \text{v'} \rightarrow \text{T} \rightarrow \text{vP1} \rightarrow \text{<Zhangsan>} \rightarrow \text{v'} \rightarrow \text{<ai>} \rightarrow \text{ni} \rightarrow \text{ai+v} \rightarrow \text{VP} \rightarrow \text{<ai>} \rightarrow \text{ni} \rightarrow \text{ai+v} \rightarrow \text{VP} \rightarrow \text{<ai>} \rightarrow \text{ni} \]
In this paper, I am going to follow Hong (1991) to take the CCs as CS. It is the degree word *geng* that serves as the coordinator, and the conjuncts are actually two propositions in which, apart from the compared part, there are still some identical parts and thus lead to the comparative ellipsis later on. As is shown in the proposed tree structure (3), the *bi*-clause, which is s-selected by the head *geng*, is then required to be in the specifier position of DegP and license the projection *geng*. Furthermore, as what Adger (2003) has mentioned, DegP is optional; therefore, it is clear that the complement vP2 is the main proposition rather than the vP1. The comparative ellipsis applies to the Antecedent Contained Deletion (ACD), in which the non-main-proposition antecedent will be deleted. In the coordinate complex, the main proposition-vP2 is the internal conjunction while the vP2 within the CP is the external conjunct.

3.2 Evidences:

3.2.1 Binding Condition C: In sentences like (4a), although the reflexive pronoun *ziji* is co-reference with both of the antecedent nouns, there is only one reading. The base form would be like (4b), in which *ta-ziji* ‘himself’ is more local to its antecedent *Zhangsan*, while *wo-ziji* ‘myself’ may then co-reference to *Wo* ‘I’ only.

(4) a. *Wo, bi Zhangsan j geng ai ziji*  
   I COM Zhangsan more love you  
   ‘I love myself more than Zhangsan loves himself.’

   b. *Wo, bi Zhangsan ai ta-ziji geng ai wo-ziji*  
   I COM Zhangsan love himself more love myself  
   ‘I love myself more than Zhangsan loves himself.’

3.2.2 Coordinate structure: According to Zhang (2004), the category of the conjunction (*geng* in CCs) is identical to that of internal conjunct. We can now specify the syntactic category of this coordinate complex to be vP, which conforms to the previous analysis that DegP can be optional to make a non-comparative sentence, and the vP2 is the main proposition.

3.3.3 A solution to the sentence by Li and Thompson (1981): The asymmetrical comparison in (4a) is actually derived from (4b). The temporal adverb *jintian*, relates to the speaking time is considered as and old information, so it is omitted.

(2) b. *Wo jintian shufu bi wo zuotian shufu*  
   I today comfortable COM I yesterday comfortable  
   ‘Today, I feel better than I did yesterday.’

3.3.3 A comparison to English: In terms of semantics, it seems to be an universal that may concerns two compared items. The proposed tree structure provides another evidence that the word order and syntactic behavior of the CCs in Mandarin conform to that in English.

References


