

On some restrictions in *bi*-comparatives in Chinese

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Bi is normally used in a comparative sentence in Chinese (Liu 1996, 2010, 2011, 2022; Lin 2009, 2022; Erlewine 2018, etc.), as shown in (1). This paper aims to explore some restrictions in *bi*-comparatives in Chinese. First, we consider why *bi*-comparatives can co-occur with a complex predicate like descriptive V-*de* construction (Erlewine 2018: 458), as in (2a). Suppose *pao* in (2a) is the main verb as proposed in the literature (i.e. Huang 1988), it seems impossible for the sentence to be grammatical, as a main verb alone cannot cooccur with a *bi*-comparative, as in (2b). Therefore, some explanations need to be made as to the grammaticality of (2a).

- (1) Zhangsan bi Lisi kuai.
Zhangsan BI Lisi fast
'Zhangsan is faster than Lisi.'
- (2) a. Zhangsan bi Lisi pao de kuai.
Zhangsan BI Lisi run DE fast
'Zhangsan is faster than Lisi.'
- b. *Zhangsan bi Lisi pao.
Zhangsan BI Lisi run

Second, we consider the cooccurrence restriction between *bi*-comparatives and negators. There are two main negators in Chinese: one is *bu*, the other is *mei*. When a negator *bu* cooccurs with a *bi*-comparative, it is normally put before *bi*, as in (3a), but not after *bi*, as in (3b) (Li 2011). This is not due to semantic reasons, as it is quite good to say a sentence with similar meaning, as in (3c).

- (3) a. Zhangsan bu bi Lisi kuai.
Zhangsan not BI Lisi fast
'Zhangsan is not faster than Lisi.'
- b. *Zhangsan bi Lisi bu kuai.
Zhangsan BI Lisi not fast
Intended: 'Zhangsan is not faster than Lisi.'
- c. Zhangsan bi Lisi man.
Zhangsan BI Lisi slow
'Zhangsan is slower than Lisi.'

Following the Cartographic Approach (Rizzi 1997, Cinque & Rizzi 2010, etc.), we will try to tie these restrictions to the syntactic low position of *bi*-comparatives.

Key words: *bi*-comparatives; negator; syntactic cartography

Selected References

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