

## Contrastive Topics in Chinese Comparatives

Mandarin Chinese has been claimed to be a Topic-Prominent language (Li and Thompson 1976). This seminal proposal has been extensively studied in a variety of constructions of Chinese. However, a lot of research on Chinese topicalization has focused almost on declarative sentences. In this paper we would like to investigate not typical topicalization but contrastive topicalization attested in comparatives of Chinese.

Comparative constructions in Chinese occur with the comparative morpheme ‘bi’, which is equivalent to ‘than’ in English. The comparative marker ‘bi’ has been traditionally treated as a coverb, which introduces a NP/DP like a preposition. Therefore, from syntactic perspectives, Chinese comparatives can have a configuration of phrasal comparatives rather than clausal comparatives, whereas English comparatives are divided into both phrasal and clausal comparatives (Xiang 2005, Erlewine 2007, Lin 2009). However, a recent investigation of Chinese and Korean comparatives has showed that, unlike Chinese, Korean has clausal comparatives on top of phrasal ones in Korean (Jhang 1994, Lee 2002, Park 2009, Park 2010, Choe 2011, Park 2018, Park and Liu 2019).

- (1) Chelswu-nun [nay-ka sayngkakha-yss-ten kes]-pota te khu-ta.  
Chelswu-Top I-Nom think-Past-Adn thing-than more big-Decl  
‘Chelswu is bigger than I thought.’
- (2) Chelswu-nun [Yenghuy-lul Yengswu-ka salangha-nun kes]-pota te salanghan-ta.  
Chelswu-Top Yenghuy-Acc Yengswu-Nom love-Adn thing-than more love-Decl  
‘Chelswu loves Yenghuy more than Yengswu loves her.’
- (3) Chelswu-nun [nay-ka sayngkakha-yss-ten kes]-pota te mescin salam-ita.  
Chelswu-Top I-Nom think-Past-Adn thing-than more nice person-Decl  
‘Chelswu is a better person than I thought.’
- (4) Na-nun [Yenghuy-ka tolpo-n kes]-pota te manhun hwancatul-ul  
I-Top Yenghuy-Nom take care of-Adn thing-than more many patients-Acc  
tolpo-ass-ta.  
take care of-Past-Decl  
‘I took care of more patients than Yenghuy took care of. (Park and Liu 2019)

The examples of (1)-(4) show that Korean comparatives can be associated with clausal comparatives, in which ‘pota’ combined with ‘kes’ clause introduces the standard of comparison. As argued by Park and Liu (2019), however, the prepositional subordinator ‘bi’ in Chinese comparatives can be associated not only with phrasal comparatives but also with clausal comparatives.

- (5) qu bi [bu qu] hao.  
go than not go good  
‘Going is better than not going.’
- (6) zuo huoche bi [zuo feiji] man.  
sit train than sit airplane slow  
‘Taking a train is slower than taking an airplane.’
- (7) ni jiang bi [ta jiang] geng hao.  
you speak than he speak even-more good  
‘You speak better than he.’ (Li and Thompson 1981)

Notice that all the examples in (5) through (7) provide compelling evidence that ‘bi’

comparatives are analyzed as having a clausal comparative clause. Here, the ‘bi’ comparative part is adjoined to a predicate as an adjunct. It is noteworthy that in all of these cases the ‘bi’ comparative part has structurally parallel relation with the target in the subject or topic position. ‘Qu’ and ‘bu qu’ in (5), ‘zuo huoche’ and ‘zuo feiji’ in (6), and ‘ni jiang’ and ‘ta jiang’ in (7) have parallel relation with each other. At the same time, note that in these examples, the targets such as ‘qu’, ‘zuo huoche’, and ‘nijiang’ in the main clause are analyzed as occupying a typical topic. In keeping with Lee (2003), we would like to suggest that the targets in Chinese comparatives convey contrastive topic construal, structurally occupying the position that contrastive topics fill. Lee (2003) suggests that Chinese ‘-ne’ shows an explicitly expressed or listed contrast between the two elements of the same type. He further argues that ‘-ne’ functions as a contrastive topic marker in Chinese. In the same vein, the targets in Chinese comparatives without involving ‘-ne’ can be treated as representing a contrastive topic.

(8) xiang bi xiong bizi chang.  
 elephant than bear nose long  
 ‘Elephants have longer noses than bears.’

- (9) a. \*wo xihuan gou bi mao.  
 I like dog than cat  
 b. \*wo gou bi mao xihuan.  
 I dog than cat like  
 c. \*gou bi mao wo xihuan.  
 dog than cat I like  
 d. wo xihuan gou bi [wo xihuan mao] xihuan de duo.  
 I like dog than I like cat like DE much  
 ‘I like dogs better than cats.’

(Li and Thompson 1981)

In (8) the target ‘xiang’ is the topic in the sentence and compared with the standard ‘xiong’. (9a), (9b), (9c) are all unacceptable because the object NP/DPs are not placed in contrastive topic position, therefore being unable to serve as the standard/target of comparison in the respective sentences. When the object is accommodated into a comparative construction as in (9d), it needs to be part of a clausal comparative; in this case, the main clause itself is placed in contrastive topic position, simultaneously placing the comparative clause in the same position.

In conclusion, we would like to argue that Chinese comparatives can be divided into both phrasal and clausal comparatives, and that Chinese comparatives are structurally built based on the contrastive topic strategy.

### **Selected reference:**

- Park, So-Young and Xiaodan Liu (2019). A view on parametric variations between Korean and Chinese comparatives (In Korean). *Language and Information Society* 36: 109-141.  
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