

A Stress-driven Approach to the Syntax of the BA-construction in Chinese

Pengfei Li Boston University

The BA-construction in Mandarin Chinese has been researched extensively in literature because of its complex syntactic and semantic constraints (Liu 1997; Sybesma 1999; Huang, Li, & Li, 2009; among others). Its structure can be represented in (1). In this proposal, I provide a simpler syntax of the BA-construction and an alternative analysis on BA itself. I argue that the SOV order of the BA-construction is formed to structure the information the speakers intend to convey and its syntactic derivation is the result of an interplay of focus and prosody. My proposal has the following three arguments.

First, I argue that the informational function of the BA-construction is to emphasize the resulting state of the complex verb. This informational function is realized as non-contrastive focus (as the underlined parts shown in the examples) on the complex verb and motivates the speaker's choice of a BA-sentence over its non-BA counterpart. For example, both (2a) and (2b) can be the answers to the question *what happened*. The non-contrastive focus on the complex verb in (2a) gives it the implied interpretation that the car is not in the speaker's possession any more as the result of selling. The non-contrastive focus on the object in (2b) renders it the meaning that the thing the speaker sold was his/her car.

Second, the BA-construction is derived from its non-BA counterpart through movement for the purpose to map the nuclear stress (NS) to the non-contrastive focus. Zubizarreta (1998) proposes that when the NS and the focus prominence in a sentence don't match, p-movement (prosodically motivated movement) occurs to guarantee that the focused constituent is in the right position to receive the stress. Following Zubizarreta, I argue that the movement involved in the BA-construction is indeed p-movement. In (2b) the NS is on the object as it is in the rightmost position. To derive (2a) from (2b), the NS should fall on the complex verb. Therefore, the object needs to move away to vacate the rightmost position so that the NS can fall on the complex verb.

Finally, I analyze the function of BA and answer the question why BA is needed in the BA-construction. Following Richards' (2010) "Distinctness Theory", I argue that BA functions as a screen to separate the two NPs in the same phase. Specifically in (2a), after the NP *my car* moves to its landing position after the subject from another phase, vP, it is in the new phase of CP with the subject *I*. There the two NPs are unable to be linearized because of their identical NP category. To solve this problem, BA is added to the moved NP. As a result, the two NPs look different and can be successfully linearized.

Examples:

(1) Subject + BA-NP + Complex Verb

(2a) Wo BA wode che mai LE.
I BA my car sell ASP
'I sold my car.'

(2b) Wo mai LE wode che.
I sold ASP my car.
'I sold my car.'

Selected References:

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