Information Structure Analysis of Cleft Constructions in Chinese

Abstract

Chinese cleft constructions, with the name borrowed from English, have raised the interest of scholars at home and abroad. The previous studies can be mainly divided into two groups: (1) The researches working on establishing and confirming the syntactic forms of cleft constructions which are generally defined as “shi…(de)” sentences (Teng, 1978; Fang, 1995; Huang & Fawcett, 1996; Paul & Whitman, 2008); (2) The studies of “shi” and “de” of the construction (Hashimoto ,1969; Li & Thompson, 1981; Tang, 1983; Ross, 1983; Zhu,1978; Simpson & Wu 1999; Chiu, 1993; Chu ,1979). There are rare systematic studies of the information structures of cleft constructions in Chinese. So the purpose of the present study is to explore the configurative and distributional properties of the information structure in Chinese cleft constructions and to figure out how the information is delivered both pragmatically and syntactically. The ultimate goal is to bridge the relationship between the grammatical representations and the pragmatic relations by pairing or detaching the one-to-one (or one-to-two / two-to-one) relationship between different parameters (e.g. the accessibility of different degrees vs. Chinese pronouns/ generic nouns/ bare nouns etc. vs. topic/ focus vs. presupposition/ assertion).

On the basis of the empirical data collected from the online corpus---CCL (corpus established by the Center for Chinese Linguistics Peking University), the study will discuss the following aspects:

(i) The different focus domain of cleft constructions in Chinese. And according to different focus domains, the cleft constructions are divided into different types of focus structure.

(ii) The discourse functions of cleft constructions in Chinese.

(iii) What is the relationship between the "presupposition" vs. "assertion" vs. "focus" vs. "topic" in each type of cleft construction? Being the important parts of information structure, how they configure and corporate with each other?

The estimated result is expected to supplement the theory of information structure from a cross-language perspective; besides, it is highly expected that the result may provide a typological understanding of the linguistic phenomenon—cleft constructions.

Keywords: cleft constructions; shi…de sentences; information structure; presupposition; assertion; focus; topic
Reference


