Descriptive Complement Constructions as Concealed Pseudoclefts in Chinese

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1. Introduction. This paper argues that the so-called Descriptive Complement Constructions (DCCs) in Chinese (1a-b) are pseudoclefts in disguise. Empirically, the present analysis explains the optional verb copying, obligatory object fronting and the existence of the murky element de in DCCs under a principled account; conceptually, it leads to a new look on the Phrase Structure Condition (PSC, Huang 1982), and has nontrivial consequences to the theory of Chinese relative clauses as well.

(1) a. Lisi pao-de [AP hen-kuai]. 
   Lisi run-DE very-fast 
   ‘Lisi runs fast.’

b. Lisi (chang) ge chang-de [AP hen-hao]. 
   Lisi sing song sing-DE very-good 
   ‘Lisi [song-singing] sings well.’

2. Puzzles. Previous proposals (Huang 1982, Li 1985, Tang 1990, a.o.) generally assume a secondary predication hypothesis (2) for DCCs, taking V-obj as a VP-adjunct and the adjectival phrase (AP) as a V0-complement, hence a secondary predicate. The treatment (2) is, however, challenged by various facts including: (i) the subject can form a constituent with V-de; (ii) a copula can occur between V-de and the AP; and (iii) the verb in the VP-adjunct is optional, thus incompatible with any Case-based approach. Further, the status of de and why the *V-de-obj-AP sequence is banned remain a myth.

(2) \[ \text{TP subj} \rightarrow \text{T} \rightarrow \text{V-de} \rightarrow \text{AP adj. pred.}] \] (irrelevant labels ignored)

3. Proposal. The structure proposed here for the DCC is shown in (3), where the subject is a free relative (NPFrK) headed by a null nominal (Nnull) and the main predicate is the AP. Nnull is intrinsically adverbial in the sense that it always refers to some adverbial component (manner, time, location, degree, etc.) relating to CPFrclause that modifies it.

(3)

Regarding CPFrclause, three types of movements are identified: (i) the A-movement of a null operator Op from inside the CP to Spec-CP for the purpose of predication (Chomsky 1977), (ii) the head-movement of V0 to the nominalized Infl, \( I^0_{\text{[+N]}} \) (Baker 2005), realized as de (4a) (cf. n0 in Kratzer 1996, Harley 2009a), and (iii) the A-movement of the remnant VP to Spec-IP[+N] (4b). In other words, de is treated on a par with –ing gerund in English; V0-movement in (4a) thus signifies nominalization (5a). VP-raising in (4b) manifests an instance of phrasal adjectivalization by which the entire VP becomes [+Adj], cf. truck in (5b). The difference between (4b) and (5b) (VP- vs. N0-raising) is deemed a parametric variation (Harley 2009b).

(4) a. \[ [\text{CP} \text{Op}_k [\text{CP} [\text{IP}_{\text{[+N]}} [\text{V-de} \rightarrow \text{VP t obj t}]]]] \] (V0 head-moves to \( I^0_{\text{[+N]}} \) (de))

b. \[ [\text{CP} \text{Op}_k [\text{IP}_{\text{[+N]}} [\text{VP t obj t} \rightarrow \text{VP V-de t}]]] \] (remnant VP A-moves to Spec-IP[+N])
4. Consequences. Since the VP raises (forced by VP-adjecivalization), what it dominates raise, too; this results in apparent object fronting and verb copying, the optionality of the latter due presumably to economy reasons. Suggesting that *de* is a nominalized I also offers a natural rationale for the occurrence of *de*, which earlier proposals failed to do. (3) further predicts the possibility of extraction (6a), the legitimate presence of the copula (6b), and various adverbial readings in DCC; crucially, none of these follows from the secondary predication analysis (2). The prohibition of A-not-A formation and overt aspectual marking in DCCs (Huang 1988) also falls into place: the former violates CED, and the nominalized IP is assumed to resist aspectuality. Overall, (3) is superior in capturing all familiar features of DCCs without stipulations.

(6) a. [Lisi (chang) ge chang-de]_; (a) dajiä dou renwei e; hen-bu-cuo.  
Lisi sing song sing-DE TOP everyone all consider very-not-bad  
‘Lisi’s singing, everyone considers [it] good.’

b. Lisi (chang) ge chang-de shi hen-hao.  
Lisi sing song sing-DE be very-good  
‘Lisi sings well indeed.’

In terms of (3-4), the PSC in Chinese follows immediately because the primary predicate is the AP, and post-I elements in CP relax under raising for independent principles. In addition, the pseudocleft structure (3) serves as a mirror image of that of ordinary free relatives in Chinese (7) with respect to argument-adjunct asymmetry, referentiality, the (non)existence of V0-movement and the availability of the copula, reflecting rather interesting correlations between *de*gerund and *de*nom. Finally, another related construction (8) is addressed and an analysis more similar to (2), rather than (3), is suggested.

(7) \[ \text{NP}_{\text{RelCl}} \text{Lisi mai-de} \text{nom } e_1 \text{ pro,} \text{ hen-hao.} \]  
\[ \text{Lisi buy-DE} \text{ very-good} \] \[ \text{de} \text{nom} \neq \text{de} \text{gerund} \]  
‘What Lisi bought was good.’

(8) Lisi shuo-de yi-kou hao-yingwen.  
Lisi speak-DE one-mouth good-English  
‘Lisi speaks good English.’

Word count: 750

Selected references