

A Study on the Word-formation of Chinese Coordinative Compound Words Denoting Kinship*

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In Chinese, compound words denoting kinship are frequently used. This paper classifies such words into two categories: coordinative and non-coordinative. Each type has subcategories. Under the framework of Distributed Morphology, this paper focuses on the coordinative compound words. They consist of two roots which finally form a NP with the category-giving morpheme. Besides, there are some idioms and infrequent uses which can be explained in the Encyclopedia.

Keywords: sexism, word formation, culture

Introduction

In Chinese culture, it seems that as long as two words refer to family members, they can be combined together to form a compound word to reflect the kinship between them. It seems that most of these words are coordinative structures.

However, the fact is not that simple. For example, the compound word *jiefu* (brother-in-law) looks like a coordinative structure, which consists of *jie* (sister) and *fu* (husband), but it is an attributive rather than a coordinative. In Chinese, *jiefu* means the sister's husband, not describes the relationship between someone's sister and her husband. So, what is the syntactic relation of these kinship compound words in Chinese? How many types are there in these words?

Moreover, even in these words, things are also different. For example, the word *fumu* (parents) consists of *fu* (father) and *mu* (mother). It actually reflects a kind of relation, but this kind of relation does not happen between each other, which means they are not each other's parent. Such kind of relation is based on a third person, namely their child. It is obviously different from the word *fuqi* (husband and wife) which directly reflects the relationship between the two persons. What is the main difference between these coordinative compound words?

In this paper, based on the above questions, a classification of Chinese coordinative compound words denoting kinship is proposed. It is going to discuss the condition of such coordinative words. More attention will be paid to the word-formation of such compound words under the framework of Distributed Morphology.

* **Acknowledgments:** This paper is supported by Jilin Social Science Fund of China (Grant No. 2018B34), The Ministry of Education of Humanities and Social Science Project (Grant No. 16YJC740055).

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The Classification of Chinese Kinship Compound Words

As described above, although the words are always coordinative, there exist many non-coordinative words. On the surface, they are all compound words consisting of two nouns, but the internal relations are different. Some are attributive and others could be coordinative.

Based on their different syntactic relations, the assumption is that there are mainly two types of such words. One is coordinative, and the other is non-coordinative. Each type has more detailed classification, which will be showed below.

Coordinative Compound Words

Coordinative is the major structure type of these compound words. From the syntactic perspective, most of the compounds are coordinative structure, such as *fuqi* (husband and wife), *fuzi* (father and son), *xiongdi* (brothers), etc.

Based on the fact, the classification of the coordinative compound words is subcategorized as: symmetrical, referential and deviant compound words. What we should understand first is that all of these three types are coordinative structures, but the main difference which distinguishes them is the reference point.

(1) symmetrical compound words

This type of compound words is the most frequently used type, such as *fuqi* (husband and wife), *xiongdi* (brothers), *muzi* (mother and son), *funü* (father and daughter) and so on. They are coordinative structures which means the whole compound word expresses the meaning of both two conjuncts. Under such circumstance, these words show the relationship between the two members by combining them together.

The reason why we put them as symmetrical structure is that conjuncts in the word refer to each other, which is symmetrical. For example, in the word *fuqi* (husband and wife), it means that in the relation of a man and a woman, the man is the husband of the woman, the woman is the wife of the man. Things also happen in *muzi* (mother and son), which means that in the relationship of a woman and a child, the woman is the mother of the child, the child is the son of the woman. These relations are only based on themselves rather than others.

(2) referential compound words

In the first type, the symmetrical compound word, the conjuncts in the coordinate structure establish a relation based on each other. This means that the relation of the two people can be inferred from the two words themselves.

However, there exists another type of words. For example, in the compound word *fumu* (parents), obviously, this is a coordinate structure. In this word, there is a woman and a man. In the former explanation, conjuncts in this word may establish a relation between each other. The word will be explained as the man is the parent of the woman, and the woman is the parent of the man. Actually, it is incorrect. As we know, *fumu* is a term refers to both father and mother. This shows that *fumu* is not a relation which is established based on each conjunct in this structure. The interpretation of this word needs a third-person reference, which is the child of the man and the woman. Another example is *poxi* (mother-in-law and daughter-in-law). The relationship between themselves is established depending on the woman's husband which is the mother's son.

Therefore, we name such kind of words referential compound word, which means the interpretation of this word needs a third-person reference.

Simply speaking, in the symmetrical compound word *muzi*, there is no other reference to make sure the relation well established. While, in the referential words, whether the relation can be established or not is

determined by a third-person reference. For example, if the man and the woman have no child, they cannot establish a parental relationship, for which the word *fumu* cannot be formed.

(3) deviant compound words

Most of the words are coordinate structure and they need to be interpreted as coordination. For example, the compound word *xiongdì* (brothers) needs to be interpreted as a coordination of *xiong* and *dì*; *jièdì* is interpreted as the relation between sister and brother. The referential compound words need to be interpreted as a coordinate structure, even though there is a little difference. For example, the word *fumu* is a coordinate structure, since it means the relation of a child's father and his mother.

Besides the former types, there is another type, which is deviant compound words, such as *dímèi* (sister-in-law, exactly the younger brother's wife), *xiongsào* (elder brother's wife) and *jiùyè* (father's uncle). Syntactically, these compound words are coordinate structure, but they cannot be interpreted as coordinate structures. In Chinese, the word *dímèi* consists of *dì* (younger brother) and *mèi* (younger sister), which means this word is a combination of brother and sister. But that is not true. In Chinese, *dímèi* is an address of the younger brother's wife. The whole word is deviant semantically. Another example is *jiùyè*, this compound word consists of *jiù* (which refers to mother's brother) and *yè* (grandpa). Literally, this word means the combination of mother's brother and grandpa. Because of the deviation, the meaning of *jiùyè* changes to "father's uncle". This is why we name such kind of compound word deviant compound word.

Non-coordinative Compound Words

We have discussed three types of coordinative compound words denoting kinship. In this section, it is going to discuss another type: non-coordinative words. This type of words is further classified into two types: attributive and affixation compound words.

(1) attributive compound words

Words like *jièfū* (elder sister's husband) and *mèifū* (younger sister's husband) are attributive compound words. These words are non-coordinative structures. Generally speaking, words like this are attributive structures. In these words, the first morpheme modifies the second one. Take the word *jièfū* as an example. *jiè* refers to the elder sister, and *fū* refers to "husband". The word *jièfū* does not mean the combination of the elder sister and the husband, while it means the elder sister's husband. The whole compound word is an attributive structure.

Actually speaking, attributive compound words is the most frequently used type of the non-coordinative compound words.

(2) affixation compound word

The last type of such compound words is affixation compound. In Chinese, there are a lot of affixes referring to people. However, in Chinese kinship compound words, the most frequently used affixes are *dà* (big) and *lǎo* (old). In such type of words, the affixation does not make any sense to the whole word. The focus of the whole word lies in the content part. For example, in *dàbó* and *dàye* (both refer to father's elder brother in different dialects), the meaning of this word depends on the latter morpheme. And in *lǎoyì* (mother's youngest sister), the morpheme "yì" contributes most to the word.

The Semantic Relation of the Coordinative Compound Words

We have discussed two major types of Chinese compound words denoting kinship, which are coordinative

and non-coordinative. Each type has a further classification, coordinative compound words are further classified into three types, which are shown in (1a). Non-coordinative compound words are classified into attributive and affixation compound words, as in (1b).

(1) a:

	Coordinative
symmetrical	fuqi
referential	fumu
deviant	dimei

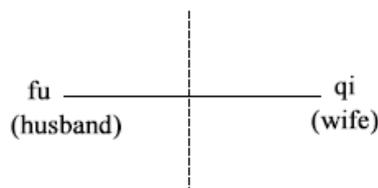
b:

	Non-Coordinative
attributive	jiefu
affixation	daye

In the following parts, more attention will be paid to the coordinative kinship compound words. We are going to analyze the semantic relation in symmetrical, referential and deviant compound words.

The relation shows in detail as the following:

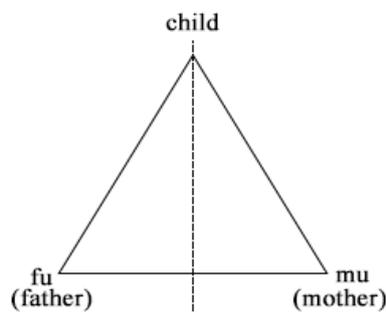
(2) symmetrical: *fuqi* (husband and wife)



The symmetrical compound word is shown in (2). Semantically speaking, this structure is symmetrical, which means the interpretation of this is extracted from both “fu” and “qi”. No other person is involved. It means that the relationship is established only between the two persons.

However, things are different in referential compound words:

(3) referential: *fumu* (parents)



In referential compound words, the interpretation must involve a third-person reference, otherwise the relation cannot be established. As shown in (3), in the middle of “fumu” (parents), there is a line connecting with them respectively. The point of interaction is outside the structure and connected by a dotted line. That is a

child, which is the third-person reference. With such reference, the compound word can be established and interpreted correctly.

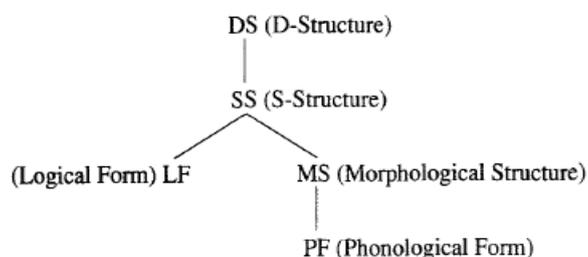
The Analysis of the Word-formation under the Framework of DM

Distributed Morphology

Distributed Morphology is a relatively new-born theory. It was first proposed by Halle & Marantz (1993) in their work *Distributed Morphology and the Pieces of Inflection*. Since it is a novel theory, it ought to be different from other morphology theory to some extent.

The major difference between DM and the mainstream of Generative Grammar is that DM does not support the existence of Lexicon. Therefore, DM is a theory which studies words from the perspective of syntax. Traditional morphology theories mainly focus on the changes of words, while DM pays more attention to the generation of words. The reason why such theory is called Distributed is that the processes of word formation are distributed into different parts. The model of DM, still of the classic Y-type, is sketched in (4):

(4) Halle & Marantz (1993)



As we can see, DM adopts the basic organization of a “principles-and-parameters” grammar. The MS (Morphological Structure) level is the interface between syntax and phonology. According to Halle & Marantz (1993) “MS is a syntactic representation that nevertheless serves as part of the phonology, where “phonology” is broadly conceived as the interpretive component that realizes syntactic representations phonologically.

Harley & Noyer (1998a) proposed an alternative to the concrete vs. abstract distinction. In DM, there are two kinds of basic syntactic terminals: f-morphemes and root, corresponding to the traditional division between functional and lexical categories, or closed class and open-class categories. Root belongs to open class, which is similar with what we call content words. Roots are typically expressed with $\sqrt{\quad}$, such as $\sqrt{\text{book}}$ and $\sqrt{\text{pen}}$.

There are three core properties which distinguish Distributed Morphology from other morphological theories, they are: Late Insertion, Under specification, and Syntactic Hierarchical Structure All the Way Down.

Late Insertion refers to the hypothesis that the phonological expression of syntactic terminals is inserted after Spell-Out at MS level. Both roots and functional morphemes are with no phonological content, which will be inserted at MS.

Under specification means that inserted phonological terms need not be fully specified for the syntactic positions where they need to be inserted. Therefore, there is no need for the phonological pieces of a word to supply the full morpho-syntactic features of that word.

Syntactic Hierarchical Structure All the Way Down entails that no matter words or phrases, the combination is determined through syntactic mechanism.

The Analysis of Coordinate Structure

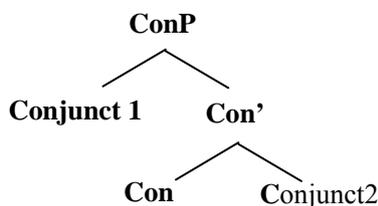
The issue of coordinate structure (CS) has attracted attention of the linguists. In the studies of coordination, the head of CS has always been the essential part. However, the nature of CS hasn't been figured out yet. Researchers, like Chomsky (1957), Ross (1967), Goodall (1987), Collins (1988a, b), Munn (1993) and Johannessen (1998), have made great contributions to the CS.

Collins (1988a, b) proposed making conjunction as “&”, which projects the maximal projection &P. Each conjunct is in the complement position and the recursive property happened in the specifier position.

Similar as Collins, Munn (1993) used BP (Boolean Phrase) to represent coordination phrase. Take the binomial coordination structure as an example, conjunction forms BP with the second conjunct, and the relationship between BP and the first conjunct is adjunction, which means BP adjoins to the first conjunct.

In our analysis, we treat CS as an endocentric hierarchical structure. This structure is projected by the conjunction which is the head of the maximal projection—ConP. The properties and features of such analysis can be proved by the Binding Theory. In this paper, the basic model of CS is as follows:

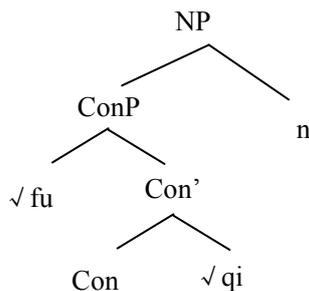
(5)



The Analysis of the Word-formation of Coordinative Compound Words

Under the framework of DM, this paper assumes that these words are formed by two roots. In the structure above, it can be found out that the Chinese coordinative compound words denoting kinship are hierarchical and endocentric structures. Let us take the symmetrical words as an example first. The structure of the word *fuqi* is as following:

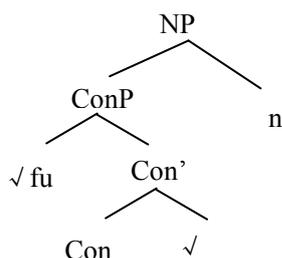
(6)



It is obviously that these symmetrical compound words are coordinative structures. The head of this structure is the Con. First, the root \sqrt{qi} merges with the head Con to form a Con', then it merges with \sqrt{fu} to form the maximal projection ConP. Until then, the syntactic category has not been decided. The ConP merges with the category-giving morpheme “n” (which belongs to f-morpheme) to form the final NP—*fuqi*.

The structure of the referential compound words is the same, take the word *fumu* as an example which is shown in (8). The main difference needs to be explained from the semantical aspect. As we explained above, what distinguishes the two types of structure lies in the reference point. It is not the problem of the structure.

(7)

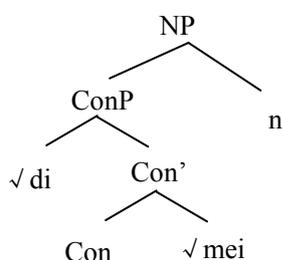


Words Explained in Encyclopedia

In addition, besides the symmetrical and referential words, the deviant words can also be explained under the framework of DM.

We believe that the syntactic structure of the deviant compound words is the same as the other two types. For example, the formation of *dimei* is shown below:

(8)



The generative process of *dimei* is the same as *fumu* and *fuqi*. The only difference we have talked about is that this word is deviant semantically. Then, how do people understand the deviant meaning of such word?

In DM, the Encyclopedia is a place where the meanings of idioms are collected together. Here, the term idiom refers to any expression which cannot be interpreted from its syntactic structure, thus it can be a traditional idiom, a word or even a part of a word. We can regard the Encyclopedia as a part of people’s language knowledge. It is the conceptual interface of PF and LF. So, the interpretation of the deviant word, such as *dimei* is interpreted in the Encyclopedia. That is why people can still understand the meaning of the deviant word when the coordinative structure of such word remains.

Moreover, through the observation, it can be found out that under some circumstances, the meanings of the words are different. For example:

(9)

- | | | | |
|----|-------|-----|----------|
| a. | women | shi | xiongdi |
| | we | are | brothers |
| b. | ta | shi | wo |
| | he | is | my |
| | | | xiongdi |
| | | | brother |

(10)

- | | | | |
|----|-------|-----|---------|
| a. | women | shi | jiemei |
| | we | are | sisters |
| b. | ta | shi | wo |
| | she | is | my |
| | | | jiemei |
| | | | sister |

In (9a) and (10a), both *xiongdì* and *jiemei* are the words we discussed above. They are the typical symmetrical compound words. However, in (9b) and (10b), because of the change of the syntactic structure of the sentence, the interpretation of the word has changed. In detail, the word *xiongdì* in (9b) does not denote the kinship. It denotes a relationship between friends. In (10b) the word *jiemei* is more like describing a relation between two closed female friends. As we can see, the meanings of these two words have changed. This paper believes that the changed interpretation of these words needs to be explained in the Encyclopedia.

Actually, words like *xiongdì* and *jiemei* in (9b) and (10b) are more like idioms in some Chinese dialects. Some elder women call each other *jiemei* with a rhotic accent, which shows the closed relationship between each other. This is why such words need to be explained in the Encyclopedia.

Conclusion

Based on the classification of Chinese compound words denoting kinship, this paper discusses the properties and features of the coordinative compound words. It assumes that the basic elements of the formation are roots. Coordinate Structure is hierarchical and endocentric. One root merges with Con, which is the head of ConP, and then merges with another root to form ConP. Finally, the ConP merges with a category-giving morpheme to form the compound word.

In DM, the word-formation can be found out. Besides, there are some coordinative compound words which are idioms and possess deviant meaning need to be explained when they are put into the Encyclopedia.

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