

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It has been pointed out (Stassen 2000) that the world's languages vary in terms of the distinction between coordination and comitativity, i.e. some languages mark the distinction while others do not. For example, Paris (2005a) observes that while English and French mark a morpho-syntactic difference between coordination (*and/et*) and comitativity (*with/avec*) as shown in (1a)<sup>2</sup> and (1b) respectively, Chinese does not seem to be able to make such a formal distinction, as illustrated in (2).

(1) a. Coordination

John and Mary read some novels.

Jean et Marie lisent des romans.

b. Comitativity

John read some novels with Mary.

Jean lit des romans avec Marie.

(2) Zhangsan      gen      Mali      du      le      yixie      xiaoshuo

張三              跟              瑪莉      讀      了      一些      小說<sup>3</sup>

Zhangsan      GEN      Mali      read      PFV      some      novel

i. 'Zhangsan and Mali read some novels.'

ii. 'Zhangsan read some novels with Mali.'

In (1a), the two participants perform the same action, i.e. reading some novels.

However, it is not clear whether John and Mary read some novels separately or

together. Thus, the English sentence can be paraphrased as *John and Mary read some*

*novels together* or *John and Mary read some novels separately*. In contrast, the two

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<sup>2</sup> Unless mentioned otherwise, all the examples provided in this thesis are from the author.

<sup>3</sup> In all the Chinese examples, Chinese characters are added above the English glosses for the sake of intelligibility.

participants in (1b), a comitative construction, will be taken to perform the denoted action together.

On the other hand, Chinese *gen* in sentence (2) is ambiguous. It can be perceived as a conjunction or as a preposition marking comitativity.

The ambiguous functions and interpretations of Chinese *gen* have been the focus of research in Chinese linguistics for the past few decades (*cf.* Teng 1970, Tang 1979, Paris 2005a-b among others). Among these studies, Teng (1970:333), in particular, points out that *gen* can also mark a “principal” participant<sup>4</sup> in the predicated event.

Consider sentence (3).

- (3) Li taitai yao gen Li xiansheng dao Riben qu  
李太太要跟李先生到日本去  
Li Mrs. want GEN Li Mr. reach Japan go  
a. ‘Mrs. Li wants to follow Mr. Li to Japan.’  
b. ‘Mrs. Li wants to go to Japan with Mr. Li.’

In sentence (3), *gen* is said to retain some verbal properties and can serve to introduce the principal referent in the event. In fact, as we will show in Chapter 3, *gen* in sentence (3) is ambiguous between a verb and a preposition.

The present study aims to explore the multifunctional usages of Chinese *gen* from a syntactic and semantic perspective. We seek to provide a comprehensive study on the syntactic distribution and semantic interpretations of *gen*. We also try to show

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<sup>4</sup> The principal participant refers to the initiator of the predicated event, i.e. the second referent, the one that occurs after *gen*. This is referred to as the “principality” notion by Teng (1970:333). Note, however, that the subject of the sentence (3) remains *Li taitai* ‘Mrs. Li’.

that the dual functions of *gen* in sentence (2) as ‘and’ or ‘with’ and in sentence (3) as ‘to follow’ and ‘with’ are determined by verbal semantics. More specifically, the purpose of this thesis is to establish a continuum whereby verbal semantics and the syntactic position of modifying elements interact closely giving rise to different behaviors of *gen*. We claim that (i) at one end of the posited continuum, *gen* functions only as a conjunction, (ii) at the other end, *gen* can be analyzed as a verb, as a preposition and as a conjunction, and (iii) between the two ends, *gen* can be a preposition and a conjunction.

The corpus of this thesis consists of data collected by the author. The recorded data in our corpus come from a variety of sources such as TV variety shows, TV talk shows, student class presentations, professor lectures in class, conferences and symposiums, and personal conversations. We also consulted *Academia Sinica Balanced Corpus of Modern Chinese* and Dr. Tseng Shu-chuan’s *Archives and Linguistic Representations of Spoken Taiwan Mandarin*. Some illustrative examples in this thesis are cited from previous studies and some are constructed by the author whenever necessary.

The organization of this thesis goes as follows: Chapter 2 reviews two typological papers related to coordination and comitativity and five Chinese studies on *gen*. Chapter 3 addresses the syntactic distribution and semantic interpretations of

*gen* as a verb, as a preposition and as a conjunction, and the nature of the noun phrases appearing adjacent to *gen*. Chapter 4 reviews previous verbal semantic frameworks and proposes our own verbal semantic framework to account for the different interpretations of *gen*. Chapter 5 presents the “continuum” idea and shows how each interpretation of *gen* could fit into the continuum. Chapter 6 summarizes these findings and provides topics for further research.