

Abstracts of the Chinese papers in English

DOI 10.1515/caslar-2015-0008

Zhou Mingqiang

Pragmatic function and cognitive characteristics of discourse markers of complaints

Discourse markers of complaints, mainly including ‘zhēnshì/yě zhēnshì’ (‘really / is really’), ‘zhēnshìde /yě zhēnshìde’ (‘really / is really’), ‘hébi ne’ (‘why bother’), ‘hékǔ ne’ (‘why bother’), ‘zhìyù mā’ (‘need you ...’), ‘nǐ kàn nǐ’ (‘look at you’), ‘bù shì wǒ shuō nǐ’ (‘I want to remind you’), ‘bù shì wǒ V nǐ’ (‘I want to VERB you’), ‘kàn / qiáo nǐ shuōde’ (‘well, listen to you’), ‘nǐ zhè ge / zhè zhǒng rén a’ (‘oh, the likes of you’), ‘zài zěnme shuō’ (‘anyway’), etc., express complaint feelings.

The pragmatic frame of discourse markers of complaints includes WHOM, WHY and WHAT, among which WHOM and WHAT are two vital factors. People usually complain in three cases: first is to complain behind the back of an interlocutor, which is graver than the second, to complain face to face; third is to complain about oneself, which is usually in a light way or just to boast with sly humor. The cause of complaints is sometimes identical to the content to be complained about, including complaining interlocutors’ behavior and its consequences, interlocutors’ thought and speech, among which the complaints about interlocutors’ behaviors and its consequences are more common than the complaints about interlocutors’ thought and speech. Different discourse markers of complaints might intensify, weaken or even alleviate the complaining feelings. Depending on different complaining interlocutors and the content to be complained about, the speakers choose corresponding discourse markers of complaints to make the complaining content fit their feelings. The sentiments of complaints can be classified into following categories: the first is a self-compliment, a false complaint concealing actual praise; the second is caring displeasure, a tender complaint with sympathy, friendliness and affection to remind the addresser of inappropriateness; the third is blaming in different degrees, a complaint of criticism with an excuse in a stern tone, or that of disapproval with no excuse in the same tone, or that of mocking in a teasing tone, as well as that of self-reproach, of persuasion, of rejection, of marked ellipsis with no gist and ground of the blame, etc. The sentiments of complaint may be expressed with the marked speech with criticism and blame at the fore,

while the marked speech is indispensable from the changeable context of complaints due to a wide variety of complainers.

The objects to be complained about can be the interlocutors, the speaker him/herself and the facts. When the object to be complained about is the interlocutor, the speaker may complain to them face to face, or behind their back; when an object to be complained about is facts, the complaints will be with a lighter tone, and only with comments and descriptions on the facts; when the object to be complained about is the speaker him/herself, the complaints will be with lightest tone. The discourse markers of complaints are usually used in the negative contexts, mainly by 4 means: first is to use negative sentences, second is to use contrast expressions, third is to use rhetorical questions, fourth is to use some other special expression, such as Chinese idioms ‘duì niú tán qín’ (‘play the lute to a cow’), ‘diū rén xiàn yǎn’ (‘disgraced’) etc., or commentary adverbs, such as ‘chàdiǎner’ (‘almost’), ‘jiǎnzǐ’ (‘simply’), ‘lǎoshì’ (‘always’), ‘hébi’ (similar to ‘why must...’), or sentence constructions with negative connotation, such as ‘lián... dōu’, ‘gēnběn bù...’, ‘yě tài...’ etc. When discourse markers are used in the negative contexts, the scale of complaining tone is like this (from heavy to light): rhetorical question sentence > negative sentence > contrast sentence > other sentence.

To choose the right discourse markers of complaints, the speakers must correctly understand the functions of the corresponding discourse markers. Meanwhile, listeners can catch the speakers’ real implication by seizing the characteristics of the discourse markers of complaints.

The discourse markers of complaints can be researched in terms of the following aspects: the impacts of contexts, the common and distinct functions of the complaint markers, and the convergence of cognition on the pragmatic function.

Keywords: discourse markers, complaint, pragmatic function, complaint feelings, language cognition

Wang Xiaoling

The syntactic and semantic interface of construction “yi X jiu Y” in Chinese

This paper describes the two sub-constructions of construction “yī X jiù Y” in Chinese and their constructional meanings. One can be characterized as “yī V1 jiù (V1) + extent” featured with one verb of two occurrences, in which two verbs are the same and the second occurrence can be omitted freely while its “extent” is un-omissible; meaning that events can be easily achieved to a certain extent,

while the other can be characterized as “yī V1 jiù V2”, featured with two different verbs and no extent expression required, meaning that one event tags another.

Their inconsistency of meanings is the product of the form-meaning pairing. In classic Chinese, the meaning of “yī” was “the beginning of a period of time”, “the minimum of a quantity” or “the first one in a rank” etc. That of “jiù” was a verb rather than an adverb in classic Chinese, meaning “close to or approaching something or somewhere”. Over the centuries, their original meaning shifted from the spatial category to the temporal category. In the first construction, “yī” turns from “the beginning of the time” to “the beginning of an action”; and “jiù” turns from “short distance” to “short time”. Thus, the construction means “once one starts doing something, he can easily achieve it to a certain extent”. In the second construction, “yī” turns from “the beginning of the time” to “a period of short time”; and “jiù” turns from “short distance” to “short time”. Therefore, the construction means “very shortly after accomplishing verb 1, one starts doing verb 2”.

The different construction meanings come from conventional collocations between words in the sentences. Such as the first construction, the extent expression is supposed to be linked closely to the verb after “yī”, therefore the verb is supposed to be consecutive instead of instantaneous.

Once the cognitive schema of constructions projected from the realis region to the irrealis region over several hundreds of years, both the two constructions can be turned into conditional sentences, expressing habitual meanings. The latter part of this paper explores the semantic motivation of semantic renovation from temporal relation to conditional relation, which is that the semantic context within the sentence turns from realis to irrealis. The paper notices syntactic conditions of habitual meaning of this construction, such as no past tense, a generic-noun-subject usage, a period (time)-event reference and usage of conditional sentence marks, epistemic modal verbs, frequency adverbs etc. At the end of the paper, a highly operative process model has been postulated to describe generation of the habitual meaning of these constructions.

Keywords: construction “yī Xjiù Y”, habitual meaning, irrealis, conditional relation

Priscilla Chou

Difficulties in reading and reading aloud for primary school students from South Asian ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong

The migration of South Asians to Hong Kong generally resulted from the free trade policies under the 100-year British colonial rule. The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) coordinated with the Home Affairs Bureau in 1999 because

of the substantial increase in the population of South Asians in Hong Kong. In addition, the C&SD contracted a private consulting firm to conduct a sample survey on ethnic minorities in Hong Kong in the same year. The C&SD has also been releasing thematic reports on ethnic minorities since the Population Census of 2001. With the rapid increase in the South Asian population, the number of South Asian students experiencing difficulties in matriculation because of poor Chinese proficiency has increased. This problem is currently one of the most important issues in education in Hong Kong.

In recent years, many scholars have made it clear that the biggest obstacle for South Asian high school students learning the Chinese language is that of attaining a satisfactory level of proficiency in writing, with reading comprehension being a second obstacle. However, the Chinese language learning difficulties experienced by South Asian primary school students are still inconclusive. This paper attempts to compare the writing and reading performance of 32 P3 South Asian students through tests, interviews and lesson observations. The researcher also tries to examine the difficulties and problems of 10 P3 South Asian students in reading aloud by conducting interviews and lesson observations. The results show that research subjects who have reached a basic level of writing ability face greater obstacles in reading comprehension than in writing and that students' difficulties in reading may not have been given the attention they warrant. On the other hand, reading aloud is actually an oral version of reading comprehension. As "reading aloud" is not included in the formal syllabuses and teaching schedules of "listening, speaking, reading and writing" in primary school, the difficulties of "reading aloud" among South Asian primary school students is often overlooked.

The article concludes with some suggestions to improve the performance of reading comprehension and reading aloud of South Asian primary school students, hoping to effectively draw the attention of second language teachers towards the latent difficulties of reading comprehension and reading aloud of their students, so that such learning difficulties in the Chinese language for South Asian primary school students can be alleviated.

Keywords: Difficulties in reading, Hong Kong, students from South Asian ethnic minority groups, primary school students, reading, reading aloud