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Subjectivity in Mandarin Chinese

The meaning and use of causal connectives in written discourse

This dissertation investigates the way in which ‘subjectivity’ – the degree to which the speaker expresses herself in the utterance – constrains the use of Chinese causal connectives, and into the universal and language-specific properties associated with this use. It starts with a literature review theoretically evaluating the potential for the western notion of subjectivity to explain the usage patterns of causal connectives in Chinese discourse, followed by corpus-based analyses of eight Chinese causal connectives in terms of subjectivity across different genres of written text (i.e., news reports, novels, and opinion pieces). The results indicate that overall, Chinese causal connectives show systematic variation in terms of subjectivity. Six of them (i.e., jiran, yinwei, youyu, all translated as ‘because’; and kejian, yin’er, yushi, all translated as ‘so/therefore’) display subjectivity profiles that differ from each other, and are robust across genres, whereas two other causal connectives (i.e., suoyi and yinci, both translated as ‘so/therefore’) manifest genre-sensitivity. The dissertation discusses implications of these findings for the way in which connectives are stored in the lexicon. In an eye-tracking experiment, it was investigated whether and how the degrees of subjectivity encoded in subjective/objective causal connectives affect the online processing of Chinese discourse.