Subjectivity, causality and connectives in Mandarin Chinese

Converging evidence from written, spoken and social media discourse

This dissertation presents a series of four studies on the linguistic categorization of Mandarin causal connectives from the perspective of subjectivity, and to what extent the subjectivity property of each connective holds across a range of discourse with variable producing processes and contexts. Based on written, spoken and social media discourse, two corpus studies were conducted on reason connectives (jírán, yǐnwèi and yóuyú, 'because') and result connectives (kějiàn, suǒyǐ, yīncǐ and yúshì, 'so/therefore'), respectively. An experimental follow-up study tested the validity of corpus findings with crowdsourced data from native speakers. A fourth study investigated causal relations marked with two connectives, referred to as double marking (DM).

Results of the corpus analysis show that, regardless of the distinctive discourse types, the connectives (both reason and result) differ systematically regarding the subjectivity features of a causal relation they prototypically express. Converging evidence for the findings comes from the results of the crowdsourcing study on result connectives. That study also shows the role of modality words (hedging or boosting) in predicting the results. The analysis of DM constructions indicates that the subjectivity profile of a DM construction cannot fully be reduced to that of the composing single marking constructions, and that DM encodes specific pragmatic effects on the interpretation of the relation. Together these studies give further insight into a cognitive approach to coherence relations in Mandarin Chinese.

This dissertation may be of interest to researchers in the fields of L2 Mandarin teaching/research, human/machine translation, and researchers interested in a cognitive approach to discourse connectives/relations in language.