Scalar Model and Chinese Climax Constructions

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Climax (遞進) constructions and scalar models are two very different notions which have been studied by different groups of scholars. Traditionally, climax constructions have been studied as a subtype of Chinese complex sentences by Chinese grammarians, while scalar model is a conceptual tool developed by such Construction Grammarians as Fillmore *et al* (1988) and Kay (1990) for studying scalar reasoning and certain linguistic items called "scalar operators" (SOs). While the aforesaid two types of studies were historically unrelated, there is indeed a connection between them. The two most important English SOs studied under the Scalar Model Theory (SMT), i.e. "even" and "let alone" (or "not to mention"), correspond to two important climax construction connectives (CCCs) in Chinese, i.e. "lian_dou" and "hekuang".

The objective of this study is to develop an enhanced SMT based on the notion of informativeness and then apply it to the study on the scalar use of the Chinese CCCs, which will be seen as SOs. Under this framework, the proper use of SOs is constrained by "conditions of use". For example, from Fillmore *et al* (1988) and Kay (1990) one can derive the following condition of use for "even p, not to mention q":

$$I(p) > I(q)$$

where I(.), called the I-function, is a measure of the informativeness of the two propositions p and q. In this study, I will derive the conditions of use for the Chinese CCCs (scalar use) in a similar fashion. For example, the condition of use for the most common climax construction "budan p, erqie q" can be shown to be:

$$I(p) < I(q)$$

whereas the condition of use for the anti-climax construction "budan bu p, faner q" can be shown to be:

$$I(\neg p) < I(q)$$

where "¬p" represents the negation of p.

Moreover, certain peculiar phenomena concerning Chinese CCCs as pointed out by Xing (2001) and Zhou (2007) can be easily accounted for by using this framework. Examples of such phenomena include: the use of the inclusive construction "chule p, hai / bingqie q" as a climax construction, the appearance of the comparative particle "geng" in certain climax constructions such as "budan p, (erqie) geng q" and

"shangqie p, geng (hekuang) q" where "geng" plays opposite roles, etc. This study thus sheds new light on the traditional study of Chinese climax constructions.

References

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