

The syntactic realizations of the epistemic predicate *likely* and its Chinese equivalent *ke'neng*: A corpus-based cognitive study

Yapei Li
Zhengzhou University of Aeronautics
liyapeisy@126.com

Keywords: epistemic predicate; raising; topic; speaker control; subjectivity

This study presents a corpus-based cognitive investigation of the syntactic realizations of *likely* and its Chinese equivalent *ke'neng*. *Likely* is generally categorized as a subject-to-subject raising predicate (Langacker 1995), as in (1a-b). Similarly, *ke'neng* also exhibits raising behaviors in Chinese, however, its range of expressive devices is much wider than that of *likely*, as in (2a-e), and *ke'neng* is usually classified as a topic-raising predicate (Tsao 1990).

1. a. Your daughter is **likely** to fail the examination.
b. It is **likely** that your daughter will fail the examination. (Langacker 2009: 319)
2. a. ta **ke'neng** hui ying na-chang qiu.
he likely will win that-CL ball game
'It is likely that he will win the ball game tomorrow.'
b. na-chang qiu **ke'neng** ta hui ying.
c. ta na-chang qiu **ke'neng** hui ying.
d. na-chang qiu ta **ke'neng** hui ying.
e. **ke'neng** ta hui ying na-chang qiu. (adapted from Tsao 1990: 382)

In the framework of Cognitive Grammar (CG), the two predicates are epistemic modals that express the speaker's estimation of the likelihood of a given event in reality. Drawn from Cognitive Control theory in CG (Langacker 2009, 2013), it is claimed that, the specific syntactic realizations of the two predicates is primarily a reflection of the speaker's epistemic control over its complement event.

The English and Chinese data are collected from BNC (British National Corpus) and the corpus of CCL (Center for Chinese Linguistics). 300 complement structures with each predicate are extracted and identified manually in the concordance. With a contrastive analysis of the data, several interesting findings are shown. (1) There is a wider range of raising patterns in Chinese in actual use, but the predominant pattern is subject-raising in both languages (over 80%). (2) Subject and object raising are highly asymmetric in Chinese. Subject raising not only takes a huge percent in the overall data, but also takes great precedence over object raising. (3) While the complement clauses are non-finite in raising constructions and finite in non-raising constructions in English, the corresponding complement clauses tend to be finite in both raising and non-raising constructions in Chinese. Overall, the constructions in Chinese do not show the same syntactic properties as the raising/non-raising counterparts do in English.

These syntactic behaviors are determined in the first place by their speaker-oriented semantic import. The conceptual prominence of the participants in the complement event and the conceptual distance with the speaker are two determining factors as well. The construction choice in English is shown to be constrained by the two factors at a time. The constructional choice in Chinese, however, is primarily subject to the first factor. Comparatively, a greater degree of speaker control over a complement event is found in Chinese, consistent with the topic-prominent and subjectivity-prominent features of the language, while in English, impersonals are more preferable to present the evaluation of the speaker in an intersubjective way.

References

- Langacker, Ronald W. (1995). Raising and transparency. *Language*, 71(1), 1-62.
- Langacker, Ronald W. (2009). *Investigations in Cognitive Grammar*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Langacker, Ronald W. (2013). Modals: striving for control. In J.I. Marín-Arrese, M. Carretero, J. A. Hita & J. van der Auwera. (eds.). *English Modality*. Walter de Gruyter, 3-55.
- Tsao, Feng Fu. (1990). *Sentence and clause structure in Chinese*. Student Book Co., Ltd.