

Diachronic Collostructional Analysis on the Chinese Construction “V lai V qu”

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Collostructional analysis (Stefanowitsch & Gries 2003; Gries & Stefanowitsch 2004; Gries et al. 2005, 2010) is a family of corpus-based quantitative methods used to measure the interrelations between lexemes and constructions, having received substantial popularity among cognitive and corpus linguists. While much work in collostructional analysis has done on English constructions, relatively little attention has been paid to Chinese. This paper offers a collostructional analysis of the Chinese construction “V lai V qu”, based on the Chinese Corpus of Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus Center (BCC). “V lai V qu” is a unique and productive Chinese construction with “lai/qu” (come/go) as grammaticalized deictic verbs. The collexemes strongly attached to “V lai V qu” are grouped into three semantic classes, which help track semantic shifts of this construction. It appears that the prototypical meaning of this construction refers to back-and-forth movement in physical space, which has been gradually extended to temporally iterative action and further a discourse marker with presupposition, as illustrated in (1), (2), and (3). Subjectification, “a semantic shift or extension in which an entity originally construed objectively comes to receive a more subjective construal” (Langacker 1991: 215-216), can be considered as cognitive motivation for semantic extension of this construction. From (1) to (2), and then to (3), “V lai V qu” demonstrates gradually increasing subjectivity. This research contributes to promoting the quantitative empirical study on Chinese constructions and testing hypotheses in grammaticalization areas. Furthermore, the analysis of “V lai V qu” deepens our understanding of human beings’ subjective thinking.

(1) “他在房间跑来跑去。”

Ta zai fangjian pao lai pao qu.

He in the room ran come ran go.

“He ran around in the room.”

(2) “他在房间想来想去，不知所措。”

Ta zai fangjian xiang lai xiang qu, buzhi suocuo.

He in the room thought come thought go, didn't know what to do.

“He thought it over and over in the room and didn't know what to do.”

(3) “说来说去，他还是选择了这个房间。”

Shuo lai shuo qu, he haishi xuanze-le zhege fangjian.

Say come say go, he still chose-PERF this room.

“All in all, he still chose this room.”

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