

On the argument realization of Mandarin inverted resultative constructions and its motivation

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Mandarin inverted resultative constructions (MIRC) refer to those resultative constructions in which the thematic assignment of the causing verb^① is inverted, i.e. the patient of the causing verb is projected as the subject of the construction, while the agent of it is the object, as in (1). In this example, the agent of the causing verb “he” (drink) is Laowang that is realized as the object of the sentence, while the patient (“na-ping jiu” (that bottle of liquor)) is realized as the subject.

(1) Na-ping jiu he-dao-le Laowang.
That-CL^② liquor drink-fall-PERF Laowang.

Laowang drank that bottle of liquor and then fell down as a result.

Obviously, such thematic arrangement does not conform to “the Uniformity of Theta-Assignment Hypothesis” (Baker 1988). Li (2013) contends that the argument realization of MIRC results from the interaction between the individual thematic relation expressed by the verbs and the composite thematic relation expressed by the whole construction which has two arguments, i.e. the Causer and the Causee, and the causing verb contributes a role to the Causer and the resultative verb contributes to the Causee. However, the causing verb of MIRC usually has two thematic roles but only one is needed by the Causer. Then how to choose between the two thematic roles? And where does the other one go? These questions are not explicated in Li (2013). Based on Li (2013), Zhang and Ma (2016) point out that semantic roles of the causing verb are selectively projected onto the syntactic positions, compacted and highlighted. But how are they selected and compacted? It is still unknown. This is where this study intends to go into.

This study analyzes the argument realization of MIRC and its motivation within the framework of cognitive construction grammar, drawing implications for the argument realization of argument structure constructions. Close examinations of data show that (1) the meaning of the verbs interacts with that of the construction: the agent of the causing verb is shaded due to the coercion of the construction; the patient is fused with the Causer and realized as the subject while the experiencer of the resultative verb fuses with the Causee and is realized as the object, and during this fusing process, cognitive factors are the motivations; (2) the argument realization of MIRC is also constrained by language users' construal as it is found that the object of the construction can be realized by different semantic roles owing to different construal, which indicates that there are inadequacies in cognitive construction grammar, which needs to be combined with the theory of cognitive construal in order to adequately explain the argument realization of argument structure constructions.

^① In MIRC, there are a causing verb, which expresses action and is usually transitive, and a resultative verb (sometimes it can also be an adjective), which shows the result and is usually intransitive.

^② Abbreviations: CL, classifier; PERF, perfective aspect

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