The difficulty gradient of change-of-state events for human construal demonstrated in the expansion of Chinese framing satellites

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Based on Talmy's (2000) two-way typology of event integration, Chinese is categorized as a satellite-framed language, in which the core schema is characteristically mapped on the satellite, instead of the main verb. However, throughout Chinese history, systematic use of framing satellites, particularly verb complements, is a relatively recent phenomenon that did not occur on a large scale until Middle Chinese. Focusing on the expression of change-of-state events in different historical periods, this study traces the evolvement of framing satellites in Chinese.

Croft (1994) and Levin & Rappaport Hovav (2005) proposed the complex event structure involved with a change-of-state event:

(1) *Harry broke the vase.* Modelled with a three-segment causal chain:
    (i) Harry acts on the vase
    (ii) the vase changes state
    (iii) the vase is in a result state (i.e., broken)

Such a complexe event structure can be represented by the following diagram:

Based on the nature of the result state, three subtypes of change-of-state events can be identified:

Subtype 1: The result state is an ongoing process of change (e.g., 沉 *chen* 'sink', 摇 *yao* 'shake', 晃 *huang* 'sway', 摆 *bai* 'swing', 升 *sheng* 'rise', 转 *zhuan* 'turn' and 动 *dong* 'move').

Subtype 2: The theme results in a discrete state (e.g., 完 *wan* 'finish', 醒 *xing* 'wake up', 来 *lai* 'come', 去 *qu* 'go', 破 *po* 'break', 败 *bai* 'defeat', 变 *bian* 'change', 改 *gai* 'change', and 出 *chu* 'exit').

Subtype 3: The theme results in a continuous state (e.g., 好 *hao* 'good', 坏 *huai* 'bad', 红 *hong* 'red', 白 *bai* 'white', 湿 *shi* 'wet', 干 *gan* 'dry' and 累 *lei* 'tired').

In Old Chinese, change-of-state events were mainly expressed by single morphemes; rare cases of framing satellites were seen for subtype 3 and subtype 2. In Middle Chinese, subtype 3 was more likely to be denoted by framing satellites occurring after the themes; subtype 2 could be expressed by single morphemes, and framing satellites occurring before or after the themes; subtype 1 was still primarily expressed by single morphemes. In Early Mandarin, subtype 3 was sometimes expressed by framing satellites and sometimes expressed by complex verbal constructions; subtype 2 was more likely to be expressed by framing satellites realized as verb complements; whereas framing satellites remained uncommon for subtype 1. This diachronic finding echoes the frequency of framing-satellite use for three subtypes in Modern Mandarin. Diachronically, the use of framing satellites has been expanding from subtype 3 to subtype 1, and meanwhile, the meaning of each morpheme has been increasingly atomic. In Modern Mandarin, framing satellites reached the highest level of grammaticalization for subtype 2, and subtype 3 has a growing tendency to be expressed by complex constructions.

This finding suggests that change of state is not a homogeneous category in human conceptualization. "Subtype 1 – subtype 2- subtype 3" represents a continuum differing in the mental distance between the framing event and the co-event, with subtype 1 the simplest, and subtype 3 the most complex, for human construal.

References

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