

The grammaticalization of Pleonastic negation——A case study of “chàdiǎnméi” in Mandarin Chinese

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Keywords: grammaticalization, chàdiǎnméi (差点没), Mandarin Chinese, reanalysis

Pleonastic negation, called paratactic negation (Jespersen, 1917:75) or expletive negation (Espinal, 2000), is a ubiquitous phenomenon across different languages, however, linguists put more focus on Indian-European Languages. As a member of Sino-Tibetan languages, Mandarin Chinese is characterized by lacking morphological changes, having such a phenomenon but facing difficulty for that the realization of pleonastic negation is not represented by certain morphemes but characters such as “méi(没)” and “bù(不)”(as in (1)-(2)).

(1) 差一点儿 没 把 裴 大爷 疼杀
chāyīdiǎnr méi bǎ Péi dàyé téngshā
nearly not make Pei old man pain to death
The old man Pei nearly pained to death.

(2) 险些儿 不 曾 误 了 大事
xiǎnxiēer bù céng wù le dà shì
nearly not once delay PAST important things
nearly delayed important things

The previous studies about “chàdiǎnméi+VP” mainly focus on syntactic structure (Jiang, 2008), pragmatic dimension (Hou, 2008) and recently turn into cognitive field. For example, Zhong&Liu (2015) argue “méi” is an indispensable cognitive marker with discreteness and empathy. Jiang (2008) proposes semantic accumulation and construction integration, denoting that the negative construction emerge from the accumulation and integration of one positive form and one negative form which are semantically reduplicative. Yuan (2012) insists semantic overflow of the implicit negation hidden in “chàdiǎn” could shed some light on the mechanism of pleonastic negation.

What’s more, fewer researchers talk about this issue from diachronic perspective, which implies we need more work from diachronic change. Therefore, gathering data from CCL (Center for Chinese Linguistics PKU), this paper investigates the group members of “chàdiǎn”, i.e. xiǎnxiē(险些), jīhū(几乎) and zhēngxiē(争些) from diachronic perspective, preliminarily founding:

- 1) pleonastic negation was firstly used in Yuan Dynasty; Ming dynasty experienced an crucial explosion period for other members so that all members can be used in pleonastic negation; the whole group entered a mature and stable stage in Qing Dynasty;
- 4) after Qing Dynasty, chà(yī)diǎn significantly carried the function of expressing pleonastic negation.
- 5) the grammaticalization of pleonastic negation is mainly implied by the host-class expansion after the driving of reanalysis; with the difference in labor division, “chàdiǎn” has gradually replaced other members, holding the central position.

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