

Inverse Syntactic Realization of Agent and Patient in Mandarin Chinese

Wenshan Li

3rdPhD on Theoretical Linguistics

SSRG, LEL, PPLS, University of Edinburgh

Lws2006@gmail.com/s0677740@sms.ed.ac.uk

Abstract

In this talk I will tackle the agent-patient inversion phenomenon in Mandarin Chinese. By agent-patient inversion, I refer to a case of argument alternation paradigm which consists of two constructions: in one construction, agent is realized as subject and patient as object; this construction is usually known as the canonical construction; in the other construction agent is object and patient subject; this construction is usually known as the inversion construction. This type of argument alternation has a number of constraints including verb selection, aspect marker selection and the quantification of agent NP. Through this chapter, I will argue that the canonical construction and the inverse construction express different events which, however, share a sub-event, which can explain why the two constructions are said to have the 'same meaning'. On the other hand, the different verb selection constraints over the two constructions can also be explained in terms of the semantic compatibility in the combination of two componential events into a complex event. At the same time I will also demonstrate how the semantic association established through pragmatic inference results in the epiphenomenon of inverse argument realization.

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