How subjective are Mandarin REASON connectives?

A corpus study of spontaneous conversation, microblog and newspaper discourse

Hongling Xiao,1,4 Fang Li,2 Ted J. M. Sanders,3 and Wilbert P. M. S. Spooren4

1 Xiamen University | 2 Beijing International Studies University | 3 Utrecht University | 4 Radboud University Nijmegen

Studies in several languages find that causal connectives differ from one another in their prototypical meaning and use, which provides insight into language users’ cognitive categorization of causal relations in discourse. Subjectivity plays a vital role in this process. Using an integrated subjectivity approach, this study aims to give a comprehensive picture of the semantic-pragmatic distinctions between Mandarin reason connectives jírán 'since', yínwèi and yóuyú 'because'. The data come from spontaneous conversation, microblog, and newspaper discourse, while most previous studies have focused only on written data. The results show that, despite the contextual differences in discourse from each corpus, the connectives display distinctive and robust profiles. Jírán is subjective. It prototypically expresses speech act and epistemic causalities featuring speech act and judgment in the consequent. Speaker SoC (subject of consciousness) is actively involved yet remains implicit in the utterances. Yóuyú, by contrast, is objective. It typically expresses volitional and non-volitional content causalities featuring the consequent of physical act and fact, which are usually independent of SoCs. Yínwèi is neutral in general, with a slight preference to volitional content and epistemic relations, to the consequent of fact, and to speaker SoC. Only one interaction with discourse style is found: in relations introduced by yínwèi, the linguistic realization of the SoC varies across corpora: significantly more implicit yet few explicit cases in microblogs, yet the opposite is true in conversations. The specific profile of yínwèi, depending on the ordering of the antecedent and the consequent, is robust across corpora. Furthermore, the relative importance of the associated subjectivity features is determined. In conclusion, the study contributes to our understanding of causal coherence and extends the
empirical database that supports the claims of a cognitive account of causal coherence relations.

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