

The Negative Cycle in Chinese: From Synthetic to Analytic and back to Synthetic Negation?

Barbara Meisterernst 梅思德

National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan

bmeisterernst@gmail.com

In this presentation, an analysis of the negative cycle in Chinese is being proposed. Chinese seems to belong to those languages in which the negative cycle is based on verbal heads (see e.g. van Gelderen 2011). Archaic Chinese has a wide range of negative markers, which can be distinguished into different morphological classes by their respective initials. These negative markers almost exclusively derive from verbal heads. They constitute the basis of the synthetic negative markers of Archaic Chinese which can function as copulas, as modal and as aspectual negative markers, and as conditional conjunctions. According to their respective functions, an analysis of the synthetic negative markers as the result of a derivational process involving a verbal head and a negative affix will be proposed. In Early Middle Chinese, a general process from a more synthetic to a more analytic language started, which also affected the system of negative markers. During this process, both the negative element and the verbal head are being spelled out, and the synthetic negative markers are gradually being replaced by analytic NEG + COP or NEG + AUX_{modal} constructions. The earliest negative markers involved in this process are the modal negative markers. In the Pre-Modern and Modern vernaculars of most Sinitic languages the reverse process, i.e. the fusion of a negative with an auxiliary verb to a new synthetic negative marker, mostly with modal functions can be observed.