

Preface

Introduction to the IACL23 special issue “The interface of semantics & etymology, morpho-syntax, and pragmatics in Chinese”

The papers in this special issue of *Language and Linguistics* are a selection of the presentations given at the 23rd conference of the International Association of Chinese Linguistics held at Hanyang University, Seoul during August 26–28, 2015. Ik-sang Eom and I invited presentations that address issues at the interface between semantics and other fields of linguistics ranging from morphology, syntax, and pragmatics to etymology. Following the conference and the subsequent peer review process, we are very pleased to publish the current collection of the final five papers.

Eom’s article attempts to understand etymology through semantic and phonological contents of similar lexical items in Chinese and Korean. The author refutes the view that Korean is genetically related to Chinese, as proposed by Pan (2006; 2013) and O (2005; 2008), among others. After careful examination of the apparent cognates these authors discuss, Eom concludes that many of their examples were poorly selected. Many of the proposed cognate pairs are not plausible due to a low degree of sound and/or meaning correspondence. Another problem is the arbitrary modification of Old Chinese reconstructions, such as cases of O assigning a glide -l- to division IV characters and converting Old Chinese *sh- to *khsl- in order to increase the similarity to the supposed Korean cognates. Eom points out their view is not comparable to other better-argued theories on the genealogy of East Asian languages. To further the argument, Eom compares the number of similar words between Korean and Chinese that are found among the first 100 words and the second 100 words of the Swadesh-200 list, following the method proposed by Chen (1996). Eom finds nine similar words in each group. When the number of similar words is identical in each set of 100, then according to Chen, the absolute number of similar words is crucial to determine whether they are cognates or loanwords. If the number is low, they are loanwords, otherwise they are cognates. Since nine is not high, Eom concludes that Korean and Chinese are not genetically related and that those similar words are not cognates but loanwords.

Jin and Chen's paper offers a truth-conditional semantic account of a morpho-syntactic construction, particularly, the range of meanings of a numeral phrase construction as attested in Mandarin corpora. Their work builds on previous diachronic investigations that identify said construction's successive steps of meaning change. They delineate two distinct synchronic readings of the construction in modern Mandarin, based on online-based corpus evidence. A major novelty lies in establishing the condition of use for the construction in question, which describes situations as worthy of attention, unlike canonical numeral phrases. Furthermore, variation in superlatives is expanded by specifying the circumscribed nature of the construction's superlative reading. They argue that the construction disallows a comparative and a quantity superlative reading, and suggest that such constraints are explained by a theory where degree arguments are lexically incorporated within the superlative operator. Finally, they contribute to the gradability literature by proposing that under a class of contexts, the construction is subject to a mechanism of 'covert intensification', which applies generally in Mandarin and across languages. They demonstrate that gradable arguments modified by a covert intensifier tend to, truth-conditionally speaking, license the same kind of situations as corresponding superlative expressions (e.g. *those very tall girls* in context tends to corefer with *those tallest girls* in context).

Liu and Chang's study investigates the lexical semantic properties of Mandarin placement verbs from a lexical-constructional perspective. It aims to tease out the semantic-to-syntactic distinctions encoded in the Mandarin inventory of placement verbs. With a corpus-based examination of the collo-constructional associations, the study provides a language-specific as well as class-specific account of the lexicalization patterns characteristic of Mandarin placement verbs. It shows that Mandarin placement verbs lexicalize a wider range of event structures than their English counterparts with reference to a motion-initiated causal chain. The causal chain includes three contingent stages: from caused motion to locational change to spatial configuration. The three stages are causally inferable and evidenced with varied semantic profiles that are syntactically realized with varied collo-constructional patterns. Thus, a placement event can be viewed as 'caused position,' which is categorially different from pure caused motion that requires a path contour, or pure spatial configuration that is stative in nature. Based on detailed analyses of the verb-construction interactions, three major subclasses are distinguished by distinct argument role selections and distinct features of the involved Figure and Ground. The study is theoretically and applicationally significant as it demonstrates how a lexical-constructional approach to verbal semantics can be cross-linguistically and cross-categorially useful and revealing.

Wang, Huang, Yao, and Chan's study demonstrates how morphology intersects with semantics in compound nouns. Semantic transparency has been found to be a

crucial factor in the processing of compounds in the mental lexicon; however what factors affect our perception of the semantic transparency of compounds has been a research problem awaiting investigation. This study dove into this problem by hypothesizing that the morphological structure of compounds affects our perception of the semantic transparency of a compound. A large semantic transparency dataset of Chinese nominal compounds was created using the crowdsourcing method. The reliability of the dataset was confirmed using various measures including a correlation analysis with a smaller dataset created using the laboratory method. The hypothesis was supported by the dataset. In transparent modifier-head compounds, heads tend to get greater constituent semantic transparency rating scores than those of modifiers, while in coordinative compounds the first constituents and the second constituents tend to get the same constituent semantic transparency rating scores. This morphological structure effect suggests that compounds of different morphological structures are processed differently in semantic transparency rating. The phenomenon that heads tend to get greater constituent semantic rating scores than modifiers implies that we are more sensitive to category information when processing the meaning of compounds.

Xie and Luo's article analyzes how semantics interacts with pragmatics (particularly, the speaker's emotive attitude) through a formal multi-dimensional semantic account of three representative degree intensifiers (*hao* 'lit. good', *lao* 'lit. old', and *guai* 'lit. strange') in Mandarin Chinese. These intensifiers exhibit mixed content: on the one hand, they show parallel behaviors to canonical degree intensifiers like *hen* and *feichang*, and thus have a degree component expressing that a gradable property holds of an individual/entity x to a contextually high degree; on the other hand, they convey the speaker's heightened emotion toward the property holding of x to such a high degree. Therefore, adverbial *hao*, *lao*, and *guai* bundle together degree intensification and expressive meanings. In the traditional descriptive literature, they were treated on a par with canonical degree adverbs, with the expressive component being rarely discussed or simply unexplained. This article bridges this gap by providing a theoretically informed, empirical description and adopting a multidimensional semantic approach to conventional implicatures to capture this mixed behavior. This analysis is one of the few formal attempts for such a phenomenon in Chinese linguistics. By doing so, this article not only enriches the scope of discussion on degree intensification in Chinese, but also makes a contribution to the growing body of cross-linguistic research on expressives.

While all the included works demonstrate how the study of semantics interacts with various subfields of Chinese linguistics, the selections in this volume demonstrate a wide range of data and methodologies: data ranging from phonologically reconstructed ancient words to online corpora; and methodologies

ranging from formal semantic theories to psycholinguistic experiments conducted through crowdsourcing. I should like to express my sincere gratitude to all contributors – authors, reviewers, editorial staff – who patiently collaborated during this three-year endeavor.

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