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4-5 June 2021

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Causal Constructions in Modern Chinese

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Abstract

The study deals with causal constructions in modern Chinese with special attention to their morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic features. There are three strategies for expressing the reason at the clausal level: simple juxtaposition of clauses, use of conjunctions, and frame constructions. Apart from specialized conjunctions which only introduce a reason, polysemantic conjunctions combine causal meaning with purpose, instrument, condition, etc. The frame constructions that have been attested are of different degree of grammaticalization. The most commonly used strategy at the adnominal level is the prepositional group with causal meaning. The lack of morphology results in difficulties in drawing a borderline between two functional classes – conjunctions and prepositions.

Keywords: Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, causal construction, causal relations, causal conjunction, causal preposition

Introduction

The paper provides an analysis of causal constructions (CC) in modern Chinese. The results were obtained in a large linguistic study conducted within a project on description of causal constructions in the world's languages (for the studied typological parameters see (Zaika 2019)) in accordance with the traditions of language studies formed within the Leningrad/St. Petersburg's typological school (Russia).

1. Causal constructions: definition of the term

Causal constructions in this study imply constructions denoting a variety of causal relations between two situations: one causing event induces the emergence of another situation. Causal constructions represent an important class of primarily polypredicative constructions, which is relatively underexplored – especially compared to temporal, conditional and purposive constructions.

There may be various ways of encoding relationship between a causal situation and a consecutive situation. Polypredicative causal constructions as in example (1) are used