Explaining the Mirativity of Verbal Classifier Constructions in Mandarin Chinese

Jiehai Liu[1, 2]

[1] Nanjing University of Information Science & Technology, liujiehai@nuist.edu.cn [2] Leiden University

Keywords: mirativity, unexpectedness, cognitive grammar, verbal classifier, adverbial adjunct

The adverbial adjunct realized by a verbal classifier construction (VCC) in Mandarin Chinese generally points to the result of an event and forms a mirative expression. In (1), the adverbial realized by the VCC consisting of the numeral *yi* (one) and the classifier *jiao* (foot) modifies the verb *ti* (kick) and points to the result *fei* (away). Specifically, the course of action measured by the VCC is generally of a short duration (the numeral is limited to a smaller number). This character reflects the violation of expectations by the outcome of an unexpected event or the deviation of the amount of action from what was expected.

(1) Qinghua yi   jiao   ti   fei   le   Dingtuan de   dao.
    Qinghua one-Num. foot-CL kick away Perf. Dingtuan Poss. dagger
    'Qinghua kicked Dingtuan's knife away with one kick.'

Based on cognitive grammar, this study aims to examine the cognitive mechanism of mirativity or the unexpectedness of VCCs. The study argues that the cognitive processing of expectations and unexpectedness is closely related to encyclopedic knowledge and the viewing arrangement of the event. Using encyclopedic knowledge as a conceptual background, the viewer derives an expectation by taking a vantage point to cast a prospective view of the state of affairs. When an unusual or unexpected result occurs rapidly, the viewer uses this result as a reference point (RP) for comparison with expectations or predictions and then takes a retrospective view of the course of events to reconceptualize the causative process, thus forming a concept of unexpectedness.

(2) Xiaozhang san   quan   da   dao   le   Xiaoli.
    Xiaozhang three-Num. fist-CL knock down Perf. Xiaoli
    'Zhang knocked out Li with three punches.'

In (2), the adverbial realized by the verbal classifier construction *san quan* (with three punches) emphasizes the unexpectedness of the result and the rapidity of the process, and it also elaborates on some particular dimensions of the process that caused the result. The elaboration of the process by *san quan* is a reexamination and interpretation of the action, which requires a retrospective view with the result as the RP for mental processing. By elaborating on the process of action, the viewer or speaker coordinates the interlocutors' common ground to achieve effective mirative reading.

Note: Num. = numeral, CL = classifier, Perf. = perfective, Poss. = possessive.

References

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2012. The essence of mirativity. *Linguistic Typology,* 16(3), 435–485.

Delancey, Scott. 1997. Mirativity: the grammatical marking of unexpected information. *Linguistic Typology,* 1(1), 33–52.

Langacker, Ronald W. 1987. *Foundations of cognitive grammar. vol. 1: theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Langacker, Ronald W. 2008. *Cognitive grammar: a basic introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Peterson, Tyler. 2017. Problematizing mirativity. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 15(2), 312–342.

Sahoo, Kalyanamalini. & Lemmens, Maarten. 2017. Degrees of mirativity. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 15(2), 343–384.

Zhang, Niina N. 2013. Encoding unexpectedness by aspect inflection. *Concentric: Studies in Linguistics*, 39(1), 23–57.