

How the concession mechanism was nourished by linguistic notions during the grammaticalization? A contrastive study of two Mandarin concessive connectors and their equivalents in French

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Abstract

The idea of concession dates back to the rhetoric field, which finds its first precise definition in *l'Institution Oratoire de Quintilien*. As a figure of rhetoric, the concession becomes more and more precise from medieval and classical eras in French (Soutet, 1990, p. 3–5). It was not until 1840 the term *concession* enters the grammatical lexicon and was defined by the grammarians as a two-step logical relation argument movement uniting two propositions (Morel, 1996, 5): “The speaker begins by recognizing the validity of an argument that he lends to his opponent in the debate. Then he enunciates a counter-argument that comes to restrict the scope or destroy it.”

In terms of Mandarin Chinese, the grammar definition of the concession was found even much later. Since the dawn of the first systematic work on the Chinese’s grammar *Ma Shi Wen Tong* (The grammar of Ma) in 1898, the conjunction, as one of the most important functional categories, was first introduced in an independent chapter. One of its sub-classifications, concessive conjunctions, is always the most problematic category because of the reduced morphology system in Chinese. According to Chinese linguists, the enunciator provisionally “allows” or “admits” the assertion or hypothesis of the subordinate by using it as a concession in the discourse (J. Li, 1924). This is the reason why some Chinese linguists also called concessive conjunctions “permissive conjunctions”.

Our research treats two most prototypical concessive connectors in Chinese: 即使 *jí shǐ* “although” “even if” and 哪怕 *nǎ pà* “even” “even if” “even though”, as well as their equivalents in French based on previous theories and analyses in the two languages. The aim of the work is to explore the concessive mechanism in these two languages that are typologically distant in a diachronic way: Mandarin Chinese is an isolating language belonging to the Sino-Tibetan languages; French is inflectional with a very rich morphology system belonging to the Indo-European language family.

It is often said that the concession is a “secondary” or “composed” linguistic concept since it combines many already complex linguistic notions that are often studied separately by linguists: temporality, intensity, negation, causality, subjectivity, etc. It is therefore almost impossible to find a simple or sole archaic word expressing the concession in a large number of languages. By relating all the crucial linguistic notions mentioned above, our research not only demonstrates the historical evolution of the studied concessive markers, but also highlights its rapprochements with certain French concessive connectors (such as *cependant*, *même si*, *ja*, etc.) during their grammaticalization processes from semantic-logical and syntactic-discursive points of view.

Our study involves various corpuses from archaic to contemporary Chinese and French, as well as technical linguistic methodologies to categorize and translate the extracted examples. The results of our research present surprising similarities in terms of the concessive evolution despite the enormous etymological and cultural divergences of the two studied languages.

Examples (extract)

(1) 节 用 而 爱 人, 使 民 以 时。

jié yòng ér ài rén shǐ mǐn yǐ shí

save use and take care of people get working people according to agricultural seasons

“Saving financial expenses and taking care of the people, get people working but not delay the time of farming.”

(2) *Les deux chats sont frères. Cependant, ils ont des caractères très différents.*

the Num-two cats Cop brothers however P3Pl Aux some characters very different

“The two cats are brothers. However, they have very different characters.”

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