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A Cognitive Study of Verbal Nominalization in Chinese

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Abstract

Nominalization is often derived from other classes, most commonly from verbs and secondarily from adjectives. Studies on nominalization in Chinese didn't begin until the 1950s. Due to the absence of explicit morphological markers for grammatical categories in Chinese, Chinese scholars have different views and great debates on nominalization in Chinese. Traditional studies mainly focus on the two major issues: the properties of verbs and adjectives functioning as subjects/objects and the *N de V* construction, ignoring the effect of cognitive factors. Recently, many scholars have begun to investigate nominalization in Chinese from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. However, cognitive studies on nominalization in Chinese are by no means adequate and flawless, many findings of which still require further verification and improvement. Consequently, deeper and more extensive explorations are necessary and significant. This thesis focuses on verbal nominalization in Chinese since it is the most common case. On the basis of previous studies, this thesis attempts to make an all-around analysis of verbal nominalization in Chinese within the framework of cognitive grammar. It mainly concentrates on two aspects: self-designating nominalization and transferred-designating nominalization as well as the *N de V* construction.

Verbal nominalization in Chinese results from conceptual reification. Verbs can be nominalized without explicit morphological markers in Chinese. As the general cognitive ability, conceptual reification acts on the component states in the process a verb profiles conceptually. No matter whether verbs are monosyllabic or disyllabic, they can be nominalized. Moreover, verbs, verbal phrases and finite clauses can all undergo nominalization at various levels of conceptual organization. Conceptual metonymy provides the fundamental mechanism for the transferred-designating nominalization in Chinese. Verbal nominalization shifts its profile of a verb to various semantic roles in the process by conceptual metonymy. Consequently, on the basis of

semantic roles, the major modes of metonymy in verbal nominalization are described, including process-agent metonymy, process-patient metonymy, process-mover metonymy and process-instrument metonymy. Metonymic modes of other semantic roles are relatively rare. Patient and mover occur most frequently among the various semantic roles in the metonymy of event. From the perspective of cognitive grammar, the *N De V* construction is inherently analogous to the typical possessive construction, both of which can be characterized as reference-point constructions with different targets. The typical possessive construction gets access to a physical object through the reference point, whereas the *N De V* construction gets access to a nominal structure through the reference point. Previous studies demonstrate that nominalization in the *N De V* construction is constrained. Conceptual autonomy has the greatest influence on the acceptability of verbs in the *N De V* construction. The higher the conceptual autonomy of a verb is, the more likely it is used in the *N De V* construction.

Cognitive study of verbal nominalization in Chinese can do great help to reveal the cognitive essence of linguistic structure, improve the study of nominalization in Chinese and provide a new perspective to solve the traditionally controversial issues on nominalization in Chinese.

Key Words: verbal nominalization; conceptual reification; metonymy; reference point; conceptual autonomy

摘要

名词化通常由其它词类转化而来,最常见的一类是动词,其次是形容词。汉语名词化研究始于二十世纪五十年代。由于汉语是一种缺乏形态标记的语言,这类研究上产生了很多的观点和争议。传统研究主要关注的是主宾语位置动词和形容词的性质问题以及N的V的构式,而忽略了认知因素的影响。近来,许多学者开始从认知语言学的角度来研究汉语中的名词化现象。但是汉语名词化的认知研究还远远不够,许多研究结果还有待进一步的证实和完善。因此,更为深入和广泛的研究是有必要的,而且意义重大。本文的研究对象为汉语中最为普遍的动词名化现象。在前人研究的基础上,本文试图在认知语法的框架下对汉语中动词名化现象做一个全面的阐述,主要考察了汉语中的两类动词名化现象——自指型和转指型以及N的V的构式问题。

汉语动词名化是概念物化的结果。汉语中动词可以在没有任何形式变化下发生名词化。作为一般的认知能力,概念物化的作用对象是动词所凸画过程中的成分状态。不管是单音节动词还是双音节动词都能发生名词化。在概念组织的各个层面上,从光杆动词,动词短语到限定小句都能发生名词化。而概念转喻是汉语动词名化发生转指的根本机制。通过概念转喻,汉语动词名词化的凸画由动词凸画的过程转移到参与过程各类语义角色。因此,汉语动词名化中主要转喻模式可以通过语义角色得到描述,主要包括四类:过程转喻施事,过程转喻受事,过程转喻移动者以及过程转喻工具,其它语义角色的转喻相对少见。其中受事和移动者是转喻模式中出现频率最高的两个语义角色。从认知语法角度来看,汉语中N的V的构式与典型的领属结构本质相同,都可以看作参照点构式,只不过在目标上存在差别。典型的领属结构是通过参照点访问一个物理实体,而N的V的构式是通过参照点访问一个名词化结构。前人的研究表明,N的V的构式中名词化受到限制。其中概念自主是影响动词在N的V的构式可接受程度的最重要的因素。一个动词的概念自主程度越高,它在该结构中的出现的可能性就越大。

汉语动词名化的认知研究十分有助于解释语言结构的认知本质和进一步完善对汉语名词化的研究;此外,也为传统中产生争议的问题提供了一个新的视角。

关键词: 动词名化 概念物化 转喻 参照点 概念自主

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Introduction

Nominalization is inherently a phenomenon of trans-categorization. It is closely related to word categories which are the starting point of linguistic research. Word class, as a grammatical category, has been widely-accepted in modern linguistics. Grammatical theories build their own grammatical modes on the basis of word categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. Nouns and verbs are regarded as the two common grammatical categories in all languages that may be different in their ways of classification (Langacker, 1987a; Croft, 2000). Nominalization is often derived from other classes, most commonly from verbs (e.g. *printer*, *drafted*, *vacillation*, *skiing*) and secondarily from adjectives (*clarity*, *freedom*, *helplessness*). Nominalization is not only pervasive but theoretically significant: certain of its properties are frequently taken as demonstrating the autonomy of grammar and the distinction between syntax and lexicon (Langacker, 1991: 22).

The use of nominalization is a common phenomenon in languages, which has drawn great attention from researchers. Linguists home and abroad have been doing research on this phenomenon. Linguists of various schools, including traditional grammar, structuralism, transformational-generative grammar, systemic-functional grammar and cognitive grammar, have analyzed this phenomenon in English from different perspectives and have achieved abundant accomplishments. However, as there are no explicit morphological markers for grammatical categories in Chinese, great controversy has been generated among the Chinese linguists over the issues on nominalization involving the properties of verbs and adjectives functioning as subjects/objects and the *N De V* construction. In recent years, more and more Chinese linguists have begun to study nominalization in Chinese from the cognitive perspective. However, those studies are by no means adequate and flawless, many findings of which still require verification and improvement. As study of nominalization in Chinese has quite a short history and disagreements seem to

outnumber consensus, further and extensive explorations are necessary and significant. Considering the current paradigms, cognitive grammar put forward by Ronald W. Langacker is the most reasonable and persuasive. Since verbal nominalization is the most common case, this thesis attempts to provide an all-around analysis of verbal nominalization in Chinese from the perspective of cognitive grammar. A new understanding of the traditionally controversial issues on nominalization in Chinese will be provided. In this thesis, several questions below will be answered.

① What's the fundamental mechanism for verbal nominalization in Chinese? What are the properties of verbs as subjects/objects from such perspective as cognitive grammar? Why?

② What's the cognitive mechanism for transferred-designating nominalization in Chinese? What semantic roles can verbs transfer to designate in the conceptual metonymy? What's the difference in their frequencies?

③ Which verbs can occur in the *N de V* construction? Are there any constraints on nominalizations in this construction? What are they?

This thesis employs the deductive method to present the views held by the author and follows the bottom-up methodology of cognitive grammar. All the analysis is grounded on the authentic data, which derive from the *Chinese Corpus of Peking University*, *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (2005), *Chinese Dictionary* (1997), *Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Chinese* (2004), literature works, magazines and newspapers as well as daily life. These sources of data ensure that points of view put forward in this thesis are well-grounded and persuasive.

The thesis is divided into five parts. In the first part, a general introduction of the present study will be given, including object, rationale, objectives, data collection and organization of this thesis. The second part provides the literature review of the previous studies on nominalization in Chinese, in which different approaches are discussed, and their limitations are pointed out from the perspective of cognitive grammar. In the third part, theoretical framework for the present study is presented. The fundamental concepts and viewpoints of the adopted theories in cognitive grammar are elucidated. The fourth part, the most important part, concentrates on the

application of cognitive theories to analyze verbal nominalization in Chinese. First, self-designating nominalization and transferred-designating nominalization are investigated. Conceptual reification is employed to illustrate that verbs in Chinese can be nominalized without explicit markers and verbal nominalization can occur at various levels of conceptual organization. On the other hand, conceptual metonymy provides the fundamental mechanism for the transferred-designating nominalization. Nominalization can shift the profile of the verb to various semantic roles, on the basis of which the major modes of metonymy in verbal nominalization are described and their frequencies are identified. Then a distinctive construction in Chinese nominalization—the *N de V* construction is discussed. In cognitive grammar, it can be characterized as a reference-point construction. In the reference-point construction, nominalization in the *N de V* construction is observed. The last part is the concluding part. The major findings of the present study are summarized. The limitations and suggestions for further study are displayed.

Chapter One Literature Review

In this chapter, previous studies on nominalization in Chinese will be first reviewed briefly. Then limitations of the previous studies will be analyzed and the perspective of the present study will be proposed.

1.1 Traditional Studies on Nominalization in Chinese

Studies on nominalization in Chinese began in the 1950s and the issue has remained a matter of controversy ever since. Traditionally, the debating focuses on the properties of verbs or adjectives functioning as subjects/objects and the *N de V* construction.

One of the most influential views is that when used as subject/object in a clause, the part of speech of the verb or adjective is changed to noun; that is to say, the verb or adjective is nominalized. For example, Li Jinxi and Liu Shiru (1960: 7) state that a verb is nominalized; or rather, it has become a noun when functioning as subject/object. As for verbs that are modified by adverbs or followed by particles, such as 劳动 and 休息 followed by 着 in the verbal phrase 劳动着比休息着好, they held that it is the group comprising the verbs that has been nominalized, and that the verbs themselves remain unchanged, thus possessing all properties of a typical verb.

However, Zhu Dexi (1961; 1982; 1983) denies the existence of nominalization (*ming wu hua* in Chinese) in Chinese, as he believes that verbs and adjectives in Chinese can inherently play the role of subjects/objects. He reiterates that there is no alteration to the parts of speech when verbs or adjectives function as subjects/objects in a clause, which is one of the notable differences between Chinese and Indo-European languages in grammar. So the term nominalization makes no sense so far as language facts are concerned in Chinese. In his view, nominalization actually reflects the belief that the part of speech of a Chinese word can be determined only

according to its grammatical functions in sentences, which will result in the conclusion that there is no fixed part of speech for a Chinese word. Nonetheless, in his later articles, Zhu Dexi admits the existence of nominalization in Chinese on the condition that all real nominalization should have formal markers. He regards that structures such as *这本书的出版* are nominal for they can neither function as predicate in a clause, nor can they be modified by adverbs. And the headword *出版* can only be a verb rather than a noun, as it can also be used in the sentence *这本书的迟迟不出版是有原因的*. *迟迟* and *不* are obviously adverbs that can only modify verbs. However, it contradicts with Bloomfield's theory of endocentric construction which requires the whole phrase to pertain to the same form-class as the head. Then arises the question—when the whole phrase is nominal, how can the verb or adjective remain unchanged? Zhu Dexi (1984) attributes this to insufficiency of Bloomfield's theory of endocentric construction and concluded that the theory needs modification. But this explanation is far from flawless, as it fails to explain the discrepancy between the nature of the *N de V* construction and that of its headword (the V).

Lv Shuxiang (1979) holds that the part of speech of the verb or adjective when functioning as subject/object is changed to a mixture of noun instead of an utter noun. Verbs or adjectives functioning as subjects/objects are called verbal nouns and adnouns respectively. For example, in the phrase *这个作品的发表*, *发表* is regarded as a verbal noun and the whole phrase as a nominal one. And Shi Guangan (1981) supports Lv Shuxiang's analysis. He asserts that they are verbal nouns and adnouns instead of utter nouns as they are different from common nouns. As Zhu Dexi points out, *出版* in *这本书的出版* can be preceded by adverbs like *不* and *马上*, whereas common nouns can never be modified by adverbs. However, the whole endocentric phrase is nominal with *出版* as its nucleus. *出版* does not identify an actual action, instead it refers to a thing; moreover, it cannot be followed by aspect particles, which distinguishes it from a typical noun and a typical verb.

Hu Yushu and Fan Xiao (1994) distinguish nominalizations at the levels of semantics and syntax. They recognize no-alteration to the part of speech of the verb or adjective functioning as subject/object, following Zhu Dexi. However, they argue

there are changes at the semantic level. They hold that verbs or adjectives, when functioning as subjects/objects, remain unchanged at the syntactical level; at the semantic level, they no longer designate any action or attribute and they are nominalized (they term this nominalization at the semantic level *ming wu hua*, to contrast with *ming ci hua*, nominalization at the syntactic level). In their 1994 article, some examples are given including 他的来, 狐狸的狡猾 and 作品分析. Hu and Fan hold that those phrases have undergone nominalization at both the semantic and syntactical levels (*ming wu hua* and *ming ci hua*), but not for 来, 狡猾 and 分析 in those phrases. They regard that these words no more designate any actual action or attribute semantically; the action or attribute is actually treated as a thing. By contrast, they remain unchanged as verbs or adjectives at the syntactic level.

Cheng Gong (1999) applies the DP Hypothesis put forward by Abney in 1987 to analyze verbal nouns and adnouns that have been mentioned above. This research method is believed to be capable of reflecting the idiosyncrasies of verbal nouns and adnouns as well as solving theoretical issues concerning endocentric constructions. According to his explanation, verbal nouns and adnouns are the maximal projections of the determiner D. As the determiner is [+N], the whole construction DP is thus [+N]. Whereas the verb or the adjective are complements to the determiner D, the head is the verb or adjective that are [+V], therefore, they can be either modified by adverbs or take an object. It can be illustrated how this approach works in the analysis of 他的这种快 and 他的来, as in the following figures:

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