

## Research on Construal Ways for Idioms Variation of Modern Chinese and English based on Construction Grammar Theory and Construal Theory

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**Abstract:** Idioms are the quintessence of spoken language and classic works, with strong national color and bright cultural connotation. They are the crystallization of the wisdom of the masses and the treasure of language. The variation of English and Chinese idioms shows great difference in phonetic features and lexical selection of idiomatic alienation; while in terms of semantic and pragmatic features, they are common. Guided by the construction grammar theory and construal theory, from the five aspects of "detailedness, jurisdiction, background, perspective, highlighting" proposed by Langacker, this topic deeply comprehends the construal ways of Chinese and English idiom variation, accurately grasps the profound connotation of idioms, plays a role in rhetoric, translation and pragmatics, and provides people with intercultural communication skills.

### 1. Introduction

Construal is one of the important categories in contemporary cognitive linguistics. Construal is the cognitive ability of people to observe situations and interpret contents in different ways. It is a concrete way to form concepts, semantic structures and language expressions. Human construal ability can be deconstructed and studied from aspects of attention, comparison, perspective and completion. Cognitive linguistics holds that construal ability plays an important role in explaining word meaning, classifying parts of speech, analyzing possessive constructions, describing basic sentence patterns and explaining grammar. People's conceptualization process is also called construal process. Construal process is involved in the use and understanding of language in many ways. Human construal ability is characterized by flexibility, creativity and diversity. People experience and process objective things or situations through different construal methods. The change of things is absolute, and the same objective external world is always in dynamic change and development. As a result, human experience of the outside world is not always ordered, and there can be a variety of construal choices, as well as different language expressions corresponding to the results of perceptual processing.

Idioms are the carrier of culture and the essence of language. Idioms, with their concise, humorous and philosophical characteristics, have been widely accepted by people and become a basic tool for thought expression and information transmission, playing an important role in cross-cultural communication. Based on the construction grammar theory and construe theory, we should study the construe way of the variation of Chinese and English idioms, grasp the deep connotation of idioms accurately, and make them play a role in rhetoric, translation and pragmatics.

### 2. Generation and development of Construction Grammar

Construction grammar is a grammatical theory that gradually emerged in the late 1980s, adapting to the research methods and genres of almost the entire language category. Construction grammar is born out of cognitive grammar, is a disobedience to formal grammar, and essentially belongs to the category of cognitive linguistics. At present, it has the characteristics of independence as a

paradigm of language research. In the 1960s, the construction grammar originally borrowed the framework semantics of Charles Fillmore. As the research progressed, the grammatical structure gradually developed. Until the 1990s, the concept of constructional grammar was proposed by Adele e. berg and Paul kay, giving a new definition of constructional grammar, believing that constructional grammar is a theoretical system of grammar, and emphasizing that constructional grammar is based on cognitive linguistics. Construction grammar belongs to the functionalist school in the classification of schools. It mainly focuses on two fields, namely the study of the structure of the element and the study of lexical semantics and its mark construction. The representative figure of the study of the structure of the element is Adele E. Goldberg, and Charles Fillmore and Paul Kay, who also promote the rise and development of structured grammar, the main research direction of these scholars is the structure of the subject. Since the 1980s, scholars have always insisted on the study of construction grammar. Construction grammar regards "construction" as the basic unit of research language. If the composition of sentences is unable to predict and analyze the meaning of phrases or sentence patterns, and the characteristics of other sentence components can not promote the meaning of the predicted phrase, such sentence structure is called construction.

### 3. Main Branches of Construal Theory

The research results of construal theory are very rich, and the main branches are as follows:

(1) Langacker's construal theory. The construal theory put forward by Langacker is the core concept of cognitive linguistics. The construal dimension put forward by Langacker provides a concrete and operable dimension for the study of the subjectivity of the cognitive subject and a possibility for the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the subjectivity of the cognitive subject. Through the investigation of construal dimension, the subjectivity of cognitive subject can be revealed. The proposal of Langacker's construal dimension provides a possibility for further research on the subjectivity of cognitive subjects in the process of translation. By examining the translation from several dimensions of construal, we can judge the subjectivity of the cognitive subject. Langacker believes that the semantics of each linguistic expression represent the organization of the scene by the speaker with different images. In this process, a construal relationship is established between the speaker and the scene.

(2) Talmy's construal theory. Talmy proposes that construal includes four aspects: configuration system, perspective system, attention system and dynamic force system. Seven kinds of configuration structures, including number state, phase state, splitting state, quantity configuration, extension, distribution type and axial characteristics, are analyzed. Talmy defines the graphics and background. A graph is a moving or conceptually movable entity, and a path, position, or direction is a variable whose value is the relevant question. The background is a reference entity with a static scene relative to the reference frame through which the path, position, and direction of the graph are described. Talmy discusses the rendering of the graph/background theory in syntactic structure, and the graph has syntactic priority over the background. The priority of noun phrases in simple sentences is reflected in the ranking of expressions.

(3) Croft & Cruse's construal theory. Croft and Cruse hold that Langacker and Talmy's classification of construe content is not comprehensive, because their classification of construe content does not include Fillmore's frame and Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor, two commonly used conceptualization methods of language. Therefore, Croft and Cruse propose a new classification model of construe content, which aims to cover all construe contents studied by cognitive linguists, and shows the construe operation proposed by linguists and the psychological process proposed by cognitive psychologists and phenomenologists. Croft and Cruse summarized cognitive knowledge solutions into four aspects: attention/prominence, judgment/comparison, perspective/position and structure/completion, in order to prove the close relationship between construal operations proposed by linguists and psychological processes proposed by cognitive psychologists and phenomenologists.

(4) David Lee's construal theory. David Lee believes that construal theory mainly includes four basic elements: perspective, foreground, metaphor and background. Perspective is the perspective

from which people observe and describe a scene; Foreground means to highlight the different components of a particular scene; Metaphor refers to people's different ways of thinking about a specific phenomenon, involving two cognitive domains, the original domain and the target domain; Background refers to the meaning or structure of one or more expressions required to understand the meaning or structure of an expression. The four elements of construal are related to each other. The selection of perspective usually highlights the corresponding elements, which in turn activates the corresponding background; In metaphor, the original domain is equivalent to the background, which is the basis for understanding the target domain.

Through in-depth research on the construal theory, the following conclusions are drawn: First, the meaning of "construal" itself emphasizes the subjectivity of the construal, the content and classification of the construal, and fully embodies the essence of the construal theory, that is, construal has the ability to observe the same scene in different construal ways; The content and classification of construal may vary according to purpose and need. Therefore, it is not necessary to exhaust the content and classification of construal. Second, the main theoretical basis adopted in China is the construal theory of Langacker, followed by the construal theory of David Lee, while other construal classifications are rarely applied. Third, the research characteristics of domestic applications are mainly the overall application, partial application and supplementary application, which further explains that the construal's interpretation of the content and classification of construal is based on their own purposes and needs.

#### **4. Construal Ways for Idioms Variation of Modern Chinese and English**

Talmy divides construal into structural schema, perspective, attention distribution and dynamic dynamics in the name of image system. Langacker believes that construal can be interpreted concretely from five aspects, including specificity, scope, background, perspective and prominence. This paper studies the classification of Langacker.

(1) Specificity. As a mode of empirical construal of human beings, specificity refers to the perception or description of an entity with different accuracy. This concept is similar to precision in systemic-functional linguistics, from which we can see the universality and compatibility of systemic-functional linguistics and cognitive linguistics. The specificity is reflected in the variation of idioms. The variant of Chinese idioms comes from the variation of the prototype of the idiom construction according to a special social phenomenon or according to a special pragmatic need. Therefore, the variants of idiomatic constructions tend to choose more accurate words to replace the original components. In Chinese idiom variants, more detailed vocabulary is often used to replace the components in the original construction. However, this requirement for specificity also limits the choice of idiom construction prototype, restricts the effect of variant construction and people's acceptance of idiom variants, and is also not conducive to effective backstepping or identification of the idiom prototype construction. In the process of variation of English idioms, more specific words or expressions with higher degree of detail are adopted to meet specific pragmatic demands in specific contexts and produce variant constructions corresponding to them.

(2) Scope. The concept of scope is basically equivalent to that of cognitive domain or semantic domain, the scope of this paper is equivalent to the cognitive domain. The cognitive domain is an internal, coherent and cohesive scope formed in the process of conceptualization. Within this scope, semantic description is possible. Cognitive domain can also be divided into basic cognitive domain and complex cognitive domain. The basic cognitive domain is a simple concept. The complex cognitive domain is a complex knowledge system with encyclopedic knowledge such as abstraction and degree. Each expression in the language has one or more corresponding cognitive domains, and the scope of the cognitive domain can be large or small. The boundary between cognitive domains is ambiguous. A specific member of a cognitive domain can become a new cognitive domain smaller than its mother cognitive domain, thus forming a level, that is, the sub-cognitive domain of the first-order level can be derived under the maximum cognitive domain. In the process of idiom variation in English, between the idiom prototype and the idiom variant, the migration of the jurisdiction often occurs. This is basically consistent with Chinese. There are several jurisdictional

migrations in the idiom variation of English idioms, namely the migration of direct jurisdictions, the migration of the largest jurisdictions, and the migration of the two jurisdictions.

(3) Background. Background refers that when people understand the meaning or structure of one language expression, they use the meaning or structure of another or more language expressions as the basis for their understanding. In other words, the background is the basis or reference for the formation of variant constructions. For example, when understanding a certain metaphor, it is often based on the experience of understanding the source domain, and the purpose domain is understood accordingly. The source domain is the background in which people understand the domain of interest in a metaphor. In the phenomenon of variation of Chinese idioms, the prototype construction is the background and foundation of the variant construction. In addition to the idiom prototype, in the phenomenon of Chinese idiom variation, context is also an important background for the formation of variants. All kinds of idiomatic variation cannot be separated from the corresponding special context. Without context, idiomatic variation is just a non-grammatical unconventional expression or even a wrong use of language. In the phenomenon of English idiom variation, the background is the basis and reference for the generation of idiom variation. Just like the variation of Chinese idioms, the variation of English idioms has a strong dependence on the background. To some extent, the process of producing idiomatic variant constructions is also a process of knowledge recognition and solution based on the background.

(4) Perspective. Perspective has to do with where people are when they look at something. Idioms can produce variants because we re-recognize the cognitive experience described by idioms and choose different perspectives in the process. Choosing different perspectives corresponds to different language expressions and their respective extended metaphors. This is also an embodiment of the core principles of cognitive linguistics, namely, the relationship between reality, cognition and language. In Chinese idioms, the variation of the latter part of allegorical sayings can best reflect the relationship between perspective, cognitive experience and language expression. The variant phenomenon of the latter part of allegorical sayings is unique to Chinese, which indicates that the Han nationality and other nationalities have different cognitive ways and abilities to the objective world. A large number of idioms in English are also inseparable from people's cognitive experience of the objective outside world. They are the result of British and American people's perceptual experience and conceptualized cognitive processing of the objective nature. While retaining the structural stability and semantic practicability of idioms, various idiomatic variants are produced after repeated cognitive experience from different perspectives. In the phenomenon of variation of English idioms, there are cognitive processing of idioms constructions from different perspectives.

(5) Prominence. The cognitive basis of prominence is the ability to determine the direction and focus of attention. There are mainly two types of "lateral-matrix" and "project-boundary mark". Both are specific applications of graphics/backgrounds. Graphics are the highlights of concepts or cognitions, the focus of attention, and the background is the part that plays a role in highlighting graphics. The base of a word is the scope involved in the relevant cognitive field, and the side is the most prominent part of the body, which is the focus of the body. The matrix is the basis for the formation and understanding of meaning. The side is the focus of the matrix content. The two are interdependent and indispensable. In the process of variation of Chinese idioms, context is the key factor that causes cognitive subjects to pay attention to the newly replaced elements consciously and make them become the highlight of cognition. The projectile is the most prominent participant in a relational statement, in the most prominent position in a pair or group of relationships. The boundary mark is the less prominent entity in the relation definition, and is the reference point of the projectile location. Among the idioms of English idioms, most of them are characterized by the separation of the patterns formed by the mutated components and the disappearance of the components, and the separation of the two elements formed by the background, the English idiom variation occurs less due to the zero-variation type.

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