



Book Review: A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences

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Abstract: This paper presents a review of the monograph *A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences*. It begins with an overview of the book's specific content, and then offers a comprehensive assessment focusing on aspects such as the research perspective, theoretical application, methodology, and typological value. The concluding section summarizes the book's academic contributions and application prospects, while also providing objective critical suggestions.

Keywords: A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences; Cognitive Linguistics; Corpus

1. Introduction

Causality, as a fundamental logical relationship in human cognition, finds its linguistic expression in causal complex sentences, making them a significant object of linguistic study. Previous research exhibits notable limitations: synchronic analyses (Quirk 1985; Xing Fuyi 2001) struggle to reveal diachronic evolutionary patterns, and monolingual studies (Traugott 1995) fail to achieve cross-linguistic cognitive comparison. The work *A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences*, authored by Professor Deng Yunhua and her team at Hunan Normal University, breaks through this dual limitation. By constructing a self-built diachronic corpus, the work systematically addresses three core issues: clarifying the grammaticalization pathways of connectives concerning the mechanisms of grammatical form evolution; revealing the commonalities and differences in the evolution of English and Chinese through quantitative analysis; and establishing a multidimensional interaction model of evolutionary motivations. This review analyzes the monograph's adoption of a Cognitive Linguistics research perspective, its theoretical application in examining the evolution of Chinese focus marker forms and functions and the grounding strategy differences between English and Chinese, as well as its corpus-based research methodology. Through this analysis, the review elucidates the typological significance of the work in providing linguistic evidence for the differences between Chinese and Western thought patterns, thereby highlighting its substantive contribution to advancing the paradigm of linguistic comparison.

2. Content Overview

A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences stands as the first monograph to systematically compare the diachronic evolution of causal complex sentences in English and Chinese. Employing Cognitive Linguistics as its theoretical framework and leveraging a self-built corpus spanning two millennia and covering five historical periods each for English and Chinese (from ancient times to the present), the work adopts a dual perspective of diachrony and synchrony for cross-validation. It reveals both commonalities and differences between English and Chinese causal complex sentences in terms of grammaticalization pathways, subjectification mechanisms, and grounding patterns. The book comprises eight tightly integrated chapters, with the following overview of their main contents.

Chapter 1 systematically traces the paradigm shift in the study of causal complex sentences from Structuralism to Cognitive Linguistics. The authors identify three major limitations in traditional research: the static description of complex sentences in Structuralism, the overemphasis on syntactic autonomy in Formal Grammar, and the neglect of the diachronic dimension in monolingual synchronic studies. Consequently, they propose a "Cognitive-Diachronic" analytical framework. This framework integrates philosophical dimensions (the linguistic transformation of the Buddhist concept of "causality"), logical dimensions (critiquing Hume's Constant Conjunction theory and advocating that causal chains involve subjective construal), and typological dimensions (differences in conceptualization between English and Chinese), thus laying the methodological foundation for the entire book.

Chapter 2 integrates four key Cognitive Linguistics theories—Grammaticalization Theory, Subjectification Theory, Construal Theory, and Grounding Theory—to systematically construct a multidimensional analytical model. This model unveils the deep connections between linguistic form evolution and cognitive mechanisms. Not only does it elaborate on the core concepts of each theory (e.g., the unidirectional cline of grammaticalization, speaker imprint in subjectification, different dimensions of construal, and the grounding mechanisms of nouns/clauses), but crucially, it innovatively extends



the application of Grounding Theory to the level of complex sentences. It introduces the concept of "Clausal Complex Grounding," clearly defining its cognitive scene. The chapter argues that subordinating conjunctions (such as causal connectives) serve as core grounding elements. Through grammaticalization, they acquire cognitive functions, anchoring finite clauses within a cognitive scene to construct complex event relationships. Combining diachronic and synchronic evidence, alongside cognitive motivations like the Economy Principle and pragmatic inference, the research provides a unified explanation for cross-linguistic patterns in formal evolution, semantic interpretation, and marker functional division, using English and Chinese causal connectives as examples. This offers an innovative theoretical paradigm and methodological support for understanding the cognitive underpinnings of complex linguistic structures.

Chapter 3 conducts a comparative analysis of the commonalities and differences in the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of the English causal connective "because" and the Chinese "因为" (yīnwèi) during their grammaticalization processes, explaining their cognitive and pragmatic motivations. Key findings include: Significant commonalities exist—both originated from lexical compounds, underwent reanalysis and analogy to grammaticalize into conjunctions/prepositions, exhibiting unidirectionality, semantic generalization, high frequency (especially in spoken language), and flexible syntactic positioning. Differences lie in: 1) Syntax: The evolution of Chinese "因为" is more complex (derived from ancient Chinese characters, exhibiting diverse forms, and often forming bracket-like connectives with "所以" (suǒyǐ)), while English "because" followed a relatively simpler path (borrowed from Old French, lacking bracket structures). 2) Semantics: The Chinese "因" (yīn) historically denoted both cause and effect, but modern usage adheres to the "Principle of Singularity," fixing it as a cause marker with a focus on explanation; English "because" has more stable semantics, emphasizing logically strong reasons. 3) Pragmatics: Chinese "因为" exhibited greater formal and functional complexity historically; English "because" underwent a more direct evolution. The cognitive motivation for both involves metaphor and metonymy; the pragmatic motivation involves the Autonomy Principle, though Chinese leans towards Utility Maximization while English aligns more with the Law of Diminishing Marginal Utility.

Chapter 4 systematically compares the asymmetry in causal markers between English and Chinese, revealing its cognitive roots. The study finds that English strictly distinguishes the functional roles of cause and result markers, whereas Chinese markers exhibit multi-functionality (e.g., conceptual words marking bidirectionally, single markers used universally for cause/result) and formal flexibility. Drawing on the "Consciousness-Intentionality" framework from the philosophy of mind and the "Perspective" dimension of Construal Theory, the research proposes that humans comprehend causality through a "from-effect-to-cause" inverse cognitive path. This leads to linguistic systems where cause markers vastly outnumber result markers and give rise to obligatory anaphoric constructions with "cause-first" ordering. This asymmetry aligns with the Cognitive Economy Principle of Differentiation and confirms the "Reality-Cognition-Language" principle. Diachronically, both languages use focus markers to enhance subjectivity, but Chinese cause markers exhibit significantly higher complexity than their English counterparts. Differences in ethnic thought patterns lead to expressive divergence: Chinese "cause-before-result" foregrounds the cause clause, while English "result-before-cause" highlights the result clause. By constructing an "Inverse Construal" model, the study provides a novel explanatory framework for linguistic typology and grammaticalization theory.

Chapter 5 systematically reveals the patterns of connective markers and word order evolution in English and Chinese causal complex sentences through diachronic corpus analysis. Both languages adhere to the "Relator Principle" (medial position > initial position > paired connectives), but their diachronic distributions differ—English medial/initial positions peaked in the modern/contemporary period, while Chinese showed high frequency in the early modern period (initial), ancient period (medial), and contemporary period (paired). Chinese exhibits a "Cause-Result" dominant word order with markers primarily focused on the cause clause, whereas English has a "Result-Cause" dominant order with markers tending towards the result clause. The underlying motivation stems from ethnic construal differences: Chinese follows the "Iconicity of Temporal Sequence" (cause leading to result), while English relies on "Subjective Viewpoint Anchoring" (result tracing back to cause). The study finds that the advantage of medial markers is driven by the "Iconicity of Distance Principle" for efficient clause linkage. Furthermore, the increase in cause marker frequency over time corroborates the "Figure-Ground" cognitive model, reflecting a trend of heightened subjectivity. The "Word Order-Marker-Cognition" tri-dimensional framework constructed in this study provides a new paradigm for cross-linguistic evolution in complex sentence typology.

Chapter 6, based on diachronic corpus comparison, reveals commonalities and differences in the grammaticalization and subjectification evolution of English and Chinese causal complex sentences. Commonalities include the co-evolution of connective forms, pragmatics, and semantics in both languages, the convergent use of focus markers to emphasize the cause clause event, and the structural optimization of complex sentences. However, English cause markers (e.g., because) exhibit a higher degree of grammaticalization, and English complex sentences more prominently display a strong profiling pattern of "result clause first + cause clause second." At the subjectification level, while the logical semantics of both languages shift from objective to objective-subjective co-expression, the subjectivity in English "since" clauses is weaker than in Chinese "既然" (jǐrán) clauses, and the frequency of the "Result-Cause" word order is far higher in English than in Chinese. The cognitive motivation for this evolution lies in the shift of construal from "separate causal events" to "dependent whole events," as well as in the mechanisms of subjectification involving intersubjectivity and perspective shifting.

Chapter 7 constructs a cognitive model for English and Chinese causal complex sentences based on Grounding Theory. It reveals how conjunctions extract instance relationships from type relationships to anchor the causal relationship of the speech event within a specific cognitive scene. Compared to noun phrase/clause grounding, clausal complex grounding

often involves implicit elements (especially in spoken contexts), requiring listeners to infer causal logic based on context. The research indicates that the grammaticalization and subjectification degrees of grounding elements in Chinese are higher than in English, rooted in differences in ethnic conceptualization. This model not only extends Grounding Theory to the domain of complex sentences but also provides a novel paradigm for cross-linguistic research through its "Explicit-Implicit Dual-Track Mechanism." Additionally, grounded in experiential pedagogical insights, it offers a new cognitive pathway for teaching English complex sentences.

Chapter 8, the conclusion, summarizes the monograph's comprehensive findings. Based on a large-scale corpus, it reveals the commonalities and differences between English and Chinese causal complex sentences across multiple levels: connective marker patterns, word order evolution, focus marker subjectification, and grounding mechanisms. The deep cognitive motivation lies in ethnic thought differences: Chinese follows temporal iconicity (cause leading to result), while English relies on subjective viewpoint (result tracing back to cause). The book innovatively proposes a tri-dimensional theoretical integration model: ① Grammaticalization-Subjectification synergy explaining marker evolution; ② Extension of Grounding Theory to the clausal complex level, constructing an "Explicit-Implicit Dual-Track Grounding" mechanism; ③ The "Figure-Ground" cognitive model explaining the foregrounding of cause clauses. Breaking through the limitations of static description via diachronic-synchronic cross-validation and multi-theory integration, the research not only provides a new paradigm for linguistic typology but also proposes an experiential pedagogical path based on "conceptualization differences." Finally, it suggests future directions, including expanding multi-genre corpora and cross-linguistic validation to deepen the typological study of complex sentences.

3. Critical Assessment

A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences conducts a systematic and in-depth comparative investigation into the diachronic evolution of causal complex sentences in English and Chinese. Framed primarily within Cognitive Linguistics theories—including Grammaticalization, Subjectification, Construal, and Grounding Theory—and underpinned by large-scale diachronic corpora, this research demonstrates distinctive strengths in methodological integration, theoretical application, and cross-linguistic perspective. It offers novel insights into understanding the evolutionary mechanisms, synchronic characteristics, and cognitive motivations underlying English and Chinese causal complex sentences. The following provides a concise assessment from four key aspects: research perspective, theoretical application, research methodology, and typological value.

3.1 Research Perspective: Systematic Integration of Diachrony and Synchrony

The most prominent feature of this study lies in its systematic perspective that integrates diachronic and synchronic approaches. Rigorously grounded in corpus statistics from each historical period, the research not only longitudinally traces the evolutionary trajectories of English and Chinese causal complex sentences across syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic levels (e.g., the grammaticalization pathways of causal connectives, word order shifts, evolution of connective marker patterns) but also conducts cross-sectional comparative analyses of the characteristics and similarities/differences within the synchronic systems of different historical periods. This vertically-horizontally integrated research design effectively overcomes the limitation of separating diachronic evolution from synchronic states prevalent in traditional studies. It clearly delineates the dynamic developmental process of English and Chinese causal complex sentences from ancient times to the present, along with their systematic characteristics at various historical junctures, thereby providing a solid empirical foundation for revealing their evolutionary patterns.

3.2 Theoretical Application: Deepening and Extending Cognitive Linguistics

The monograph exhibits both depth and breadth in its theoretical application, with its core strength residing in the systematic deployment of Cognitive Linguistics theories (Grammaticalization, Subjectification, Grounding Theory, etc.) to explain the deep motivations behind the evolution of English and Chinese causal complex sentences. It first focuses on grammaticalization and subjectification pathways, meticulously comparing the diachronic processes and motivations (e.g., semantic abstraction, high frequency usage, pragmatic inference) of English and Chinese causal connectives, cause/result grammatical markers, and focus markers. It delves deeply into the role of subjectification in the evolution of causal complex sentences and its interrelationship with grammaticalization. Subsequently, it innovatively applies Langacker's Grounding Theory to the level of complex sentences. It comparatively examines the "grounding qualifications," "grounding strategies," and "grounding paths" of English and Chinese causal connectives, as well as how causal clauses construct the "ground" (or cognitive scene), revealing potential differences in the cognitive construction of English and Chinese causal complex sentences. Finally, it constructs a multidimensional synergistic perspective, emphasizing the co-evolutionary interactions among syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic elements during the evolutionary process (e.g., high frequency promoting entrenchment, semantic shifts driving syntactic adjustments, pragmatic needs shaping expressive forms). This provides a more comprehensive cognitive framework for understanding the complexity of language evolution.

3.3 Research Methodology: Multidimensional and Multimethod Integrated Verification

The research achieves a significant feat in methodology through the integrated cross-verification of multiple dimensions and methods, substantially enhancing the reliability and depth of its arguments:

Corpus-Driven Foundation: It combines large-scale authoritative corpora (e.g., CCCS, CCL, BNC, COCA) with self-built diachronic corpora, ensuring data breadth and representativeness.

Quantitative-Qualitative Synergy (Core Strategy): It employs corpus retrieval techniques (e.g., keyword searches) supplemented by meticulous manual analysis to inductively categorize corpus data and conduct detailed statistical

analyses (e.g., distribution of connective marker patterns, word order preferences, quantification of grammaticalization degrees). This quantitative groundwork then supports in-depth qualitative cognitive interpretation.

Diachronic-Synchronic Integration (Thread Throughout): It mutually corroborates findings by tracing evolutionary trajectories and dissecting the characteristics of synchronic systems at various periods.

Comparative Method (Key Perspective): It systematically contrasts English and Chinese causal complex sentences across multiple dimensions—syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive mechanisms—to uncover their commonalities and differences.

3.4 Typological Value: Universals, Particulars, and Underlying Thought Patterns

Through the systematic comparison of the diachronic evolution and synchronic characteristics of English and Chinese causal complex sentences, the research clearly reveals both universals and particulars between the two languages across critical dimensions:

Evolutionary Pathways: e.g., stages and motivations in the grammaticalization of causal connectives; developmental trajectories of cause/result markers.

Synchronic System Features: E.g., specific differences in connective marker patterns; significant tendencies in word order preferences; quantified manifestations of grammaticalization degrees; forms and frequencies of subjective expressions.

These empirically grounded findings, derived from large-scale diachronic corpora, provide crucial case studies for linguistic typology concerning the structural evolution of causal complex sentences in Chinese and English, enriching the database for cross-linguistic comparison. Furthermore, its profound exploration of the deep cognitive motivations underlying evolution (e.g., grammaticalization mechanisms, subjectification motivations, differences in ground construction) contributes substantial insights to cognitive typology. It advances the investigation into the cognitive universals and differences underlying linguistic structural diversity, thereby significantly deepening our understanding of human language diversity and the cognitive commonalities it reflects.

4. Academic Contributions and Application Prospects

This monograph achieves a dual breakthrough in theoretical construction and methodology by establishing a "Cognitive-Diachronic" integrated framework, demonstrating significant academic contributions and promising application prospects.

4.1 Academic Contributions

By integrating diachronic and synchronic perspectives within a Cognitive Linguistics framework for the systematic comparison of English and Chinese causal complex sentences, the research not only clearly reveals their evolutionary trajectories and synchronic grammatical features but also innovatively combines manual annotation with multilingual authoritative corpora. This approach constructs a robust full-sample analytical model, significantly enhancing the reliability of its conclusions.

Breaking free from the constraints of single-language studies, the research clarifies the universals and particulars of grammaticalization pathways through multi-language comparisons (notably English and Chinese). It pioneers a "Micro-Meso-Macro" tri-level analytical framework, situating the evolution of complex sentences within the context of grammatical system change, thereby deepening the understanding of universal linguistic principles.

Its theoretical contribution is particularly outstanding. It not only validates the interactive mechanisms among formal, semantic, pragmatic, cognitive, and contact factors within the syntactic system through multidimensional verification but also initiates interface research between Construction Grammar and Grammaticalization. This provides a new paradigm for expanding the boundaries of theoretical explanation and overcoming developmental bottlenecks in Cognitive Linguistics.

4.2 Application Prospects

The research offers precise explanations of the historical origins, contemporary characteristics, and developmental trends of English and Chinese causal complex sentences. Through in-depth analysis of evolutionary patterns and cognitive motivations, it constructs a systematic cognitive map of complex sentence evolution.

These findings possess direct practical applicability. They provide a scientific foundation for optimizing second language acquisition strategies, developing bilingual teaching materials, designing translation mechanisms, and refining grammaticalization theory, thereby driving paradigm upgrades in these related applied fields.

4.3 Limitations and Future Direction

The study presents three main limitations requiring further exploration:

Genre Coverage: It primarily focuses on written language, with insufficient examination of spoken genres and dialectal variation (e.g., underlying archaic phenomena in causal markers within Chinese dialects).

Language Contact Dimension: The role of language contact is not addressed, particularly the potential reinforcement mechanism of Europeanized sentence patterns on the Chinese bracket-like structure "因为...所以" (yīnwèi...suǒyǐ).

Empirical Validation Needs Expansion: There is a need to combine eye-tracking experiments to test the "cause clause foregrounding" cognitive hypothesis and utilize ERP (Event-Related Potentials) technology to detect native speakers' neural responses to focus markers.

5. Conclusion

A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences delves deeply into the developmental directions of human language and thought, systematically analyzing the universal principles and unique characteristics of conceptualizing causal logical relationships. It stands as an outstanding achievement in the field of comparative research on English and Chinese causal complex sentences.

Professor Deng Yunhua has long focused on cognitive comparative studies of English and Chinese languages and has published numerous papers on the comparison of causal complex sentences. This monograph represents the culmination of her recent series of studies in this field.

Undoubtedly, the publication of *A Study of Diachronic Evolution of English and Chinese Causal Complex Sentences* makes significant academic contributions to the study of complex sentences and syntactic patterns within China. Its innovations in research methodology, observational perspective, and theoretical interpretation will provide invaluable insights and guidance for related research. Simultaneously, its research findings can be directly applied to serve the fields of language acquisition, bilingual teaching, and translation practice.

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