

A Study of Nominal Predicate Sentences Under the Framework of Cognitive Grammar

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Cognitive grammar, as a linguistic theory that attaches importance to the relationship between language and thinking, provides us with a more comprehensive way to understand the structure, semantics and cognitive processing of noun predicate sentences. Therefore, under the framework of cognitive grammar, this paper tries to analyze the semantic connection and cognitive process in noun predicate sentences from the semantic perspective and the method of example theory, and discusses the motivation of the formation of this construction, so as to provide references for in-depth analysis of the cognitive laws behind noun predicate sentences.

Keywords: nominal predicate sentences, cognitive grammar, semantics

Introduction

The direct use of nouns as predicates is a unique manifestation of the multifunctionality of Chinese word classes. This paper makes a multi-angle analysis of noun predicate sentences under the framework of cognitive grammar. First, from the semantic point of view, the analysis of noun predicate sentences reveals the close relationship between nouns and predicates and their important role in constructing the meaning of sentences. We find that the semantic roles of nouns and predicates play a key role in the meaning of sentences, and the event structure and correlation also have a profound impact on the semantic meaning of sentences. Second, exemplification theory holds that language understanding and expression are context dependent. In studying noun predicate sentences, we explore how noun predicate sentences convey different information according to different situations by analyzing how the context affects the meaning and interpretation of the sentence. Finally, by building a cognitive model of the cognitive structure of noun predicate sentences, we find that we can better understand the cognitive connections and information transfer modes between different components of the sentence, and this model also reveals how nouns and predicates work together to construct the cognitive representation of the sentence.

Review of Relevant Research

In the 1940s, Lu Shuxiang pointed out the existence of nouns as predicates in Chinese. Zhao Yuanren, Gao Mingkai, Long Guofu and others proposed the concepts of “genre word predicates”, “noun predicates without

copulations” and “noun predicates” (陈满华, 2006). Since the 1990s, the research on noun predicate sentences has gradually increased, and Zhou Ri'an has summarized six kinds of relations between subject and predicate in noun predicate sentences: identity, relative, space, time, score and quantification (周日安, 1994, p. 50). So far, there is no unified understanding of noun predicate sentences in Chinese grammar circles (陈满华, 2008).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Gao Hang et al. paid attention to the semantic hierarchy within noun predicate sentences, and his views were “functional hierarchy” and “semantic hierarchy”. These findings opened new perspectives for the study of the scope of predicate nouns and the relation of juxtamining nouns (高航, 2009). Pang Jiaguang regards predicate nouns as the re-categorization under the construction network and draws the conclusion that predicate nouns have special descriptive functions after being re-categorized (庞加光, 2017). These conclusions not only help to enrich the theory of grammar, but also have a positive impact on the research in the field of linguistics and cognitive science. The exploration of the above scholars reflects the in-depth study of noun predicate sentences, but unfortunately, there is still a lack of research on the formation path and cognitive process of noun predicate sentences, especially from the perspective of cognitive grammar. Therefore, under the framework of cognitive grammar, this paper tries to analyze the semantic connection and cognitive process of noun predicate sentences from the perspective of semantics and the research method of exemplification theory, so as to provide references for in-depth analysis of the cognitive laws behind noun predicate sentences.

Theoretical Basis

According to cognitive linguistics, cognitive ability plays a crucial role in the meaning and structure of language. People rely on cognitive ability to categorize linguistic events and store them in memory, and this cognitive organization constitutes grammar (Bybee, 1994, pp. 285-305). Therefore, one of the fundamental strategies of cognitive grammar in language research is to derive linguistic structures from cognitive abilities such as perception, memory, comparison, categorization, abstraction, etc. of space and time, using innate, language-related structures as a last resort (Langacker, 1991). Cognitive grammar is an important branch of cognitive linguistics. Cognitive grammar holds that semantics is not a static concept, but a dynamic process that people gradually form in the experience of objective reality and social and cultural context, which is related to people's basic cognitive ability. In other words, the arrangement order of language materials in grammatical sentence patterns also reflects the cognitive process of human beings (李丽, 2011). Cognitive grammar also emphasizes context, that is, the sociocultural factors in grammar.

Instantiation theory is an important concept in cognitive grammar. It is a cognitive operation as opposed to schematization. They work together at all levels of language, from vocabulary to morphology and grammar. Pictorial cognitive operation is the process of extracting inherent commonalities from numerous experiences and leading to a more pictorial concept, and instantiation is the inverse process of pictorial operation, and the process of concrete experience explaining relative pictorial concepts (Langacker, 2008). Langacker proposed that type descriptions give conceptual content a certain order, but evocative types alone are not enough to select the examples we intend to talk about. The conceptual theme needs to give the conceptual content some cognitive status by grounding elements, so that the conceptual content can get rid of the ethereal state, that is, the type of concept is transformed into the example concept. This paper analyzes how the situation affects the meaning of the sentence and relieves the doubt in the noun predicate sentence through the situational dependence of the exemplification theory.

Analysis of Nominal Predicate Sentences Under the Framework of Cognitive Grammar

Ma Qingzhu (1991) proposed with great originality that the sequential meaning of nouns is the fundamental condition for the establishment of noun predicate sentences (马庆株, 1994, pp. 59-83). He believes that most nouns in modern Chinese have only referential functions, while nouns with sequential meaning and nominal structures have not only referential functions, but also declarative functions, so they can be used as predicates. Xiang Kaixi (2001) believes that the main function of nominal components is to refer, but functional drift can occur in certain syntactic positions, so it has a declarative function (项开喜, 2001, pp. 13-17). From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, using nouns as predicate verbs is essentially semantic extension. The speaker extends the meaning of a linguistic unit for the purpose of communication, and at the same time, the speaker can infer the speaker's intention in the current context. The world in which people live is so complicated that it is impossible to create a language symbol to represent everything or event, so semantic extension is a natural and efficient use of the existing resources of the language system. However, noun predicate sentences do not exist in English. In English, there is considerable freedom in the conversion of nouns into verbs. Under the appropriate context, almost any noun can be used as a verb, and there is no need for nouns to replace the predicate verb. English only needs to convert parts of speech. On the other hand, Chinese is very limited in the verb of nouns. Therefore, Chinese also uses noun predicate sentences, which greatly enriches the expression of Chinese sentence patterns (Clark & Clark, 1979, pp. 767-811).

The following is an example of a noun predicate sentence from a semantic perspective and its analysis:

- (1) He clenched his legs on the ground.
- (2) Their affairs are long gone.

“Fist” and “yellow” were originally nouns, meaning “fist” and “yellow” respectively, but appeared in verb positions in sentences (1) and (2), meaning “taking the shape of a fist” and “things didn't work out” respectively, and have been converted into predicate verbs. (1) Refers to the state of people's legs curled up, like a fist tight together, this expression is more concise and clearer, readers can quickly understand the meaning of the expression behind and this posture. The “yellow” in (2) implies that the leaves turn yellow in autumn, which is the end of the matter, and in this sentence it means that the matter is over, without success. From the semantic point of view, the nominal predicate sentences at this time represent the dynamics of a certain trait of the thing, they represent the realization of a certain state of the thing, or the continuation of the thing, or the thing once had the trait and so on.

Example: This movie is a classic.

Cognitive grammar theory deals with the concepts of event structure and relevance. “This film” is the object or focus described in the sentence, i.e., the subject, is the core element of the sentence, it is the subject of the event. “Classic” is the part of the sentence that describes the state or quality of the subject. Here, the predicate indicates that the film has a “classic” quality. In this example, the relationship for the film is described as “classic,” which indicates a state or characteristic of the relationship. In summary, the event structure of this sentence consists of a subject (the movie) and a predicate that describes its quality or state (the classic). The correlation indicates that the theme is described as “classic”, emphasizing the special status or quality of the film. This grammatical

structure and semantic relationship enable us to understand the message conveyed by the sentence, that the film is considered a classic.

Exemplification theory emphasizes situational dependence between language and cognition, that is, the meaning and interpretation of language depends on specific context and background knowledge. At the same time, nouns cannot be used as predicates alone. This syntax coding rule of nominal predicate sentences is justified, and its justification is the exemplification theory, that is, the cognitive mechanism of transforming type concepts into exemplified concepts.

Example: The town is wooded.

Analysis: In this noun predicate sentence, the predicate part “lush trees” describes the characteristics of the subject “this town”. Situational dependence is that if the sentence is spoken in a known urban park, the reader may perceive the town’s natural environment, while if the sentence is spoken in a deserted desert area, it may also be interpreted as a vision or expectation. This example highlights how situational dependence affects the interpretation and understanding of noun predicate sentences. Noun predicate sentences can produce different semantic meanings according to different situations, to better meet the needs of communication, which is consistent with the situation perception and the flexibility of language emphasized by the exemplification theory.

Conclusion

Noun predicate sentence is a unique sentence pattern in grammar. This sentence pattern is easy to understand and simple in structure. Although only a small number of Chinese nouns can serve as predicates, the noun predicate sentences formed by them do not exist scattered in the language but exist in our daily life in large numbers. Each class is independent of the others and has its own external form and semantic characteristics (郝思瑾, 2007, pp. 98-99). This study reveals a deep understanding of noun predicate sentences from the perspective of cognitive grammar and provides a new perspective and method for the study of the complex relationship between language and cognition. It can be used as a reference for the study of typology of nominal predicate sentences and the study of universal laws of language, and it has practical significance for people to grasp expressive nominal predicate sentences consciously.

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