



Neutral Terms in Chinese and English: A Usage-based Approach to Lexical Semantics and Meaning Change

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Abstract

One of the least studied types of lexical semantic change involves neutral terms, i.e. lexical items that do not have a strong semantic preference. Yet, natural language use shows that some of the neutral lexical items (such as *yingxiang*/influence, *moyang* 'appearance', result, etc.) can be either positively or negatively biased without overt qualifiers (e.g. you *moyang* 'lit. have appearance, good looking', as opposed to under the influence). These biases, called amelioration and degradation, respectively, have been accounted for from diverse perspectives, such as psychology and cognition. These accounts, however, are often in conflict and lack empirical support from discourse texts. In this talk, I suggest that a usage-based approach, which appeals to frequency of occurrence as seen in corpora as well as co-text and context factors, can yield useful insights about ways in which meaning - including loaded meaning - emerges from language use and that the manifestations of the dynamic organization of language involve both overt and covert forms.

Speaker

Hongyin Tao is a professor of Chinese language and linguistics at the University of California, Los Angeles; he also holds an honorary Distinguished Chair Professor position at the National Taiwan Normal University (since 2015), was a Fulbright Canada Research Chair with the University of Alberta (2022), and was a Sydney China Distinguished Fellow with the University of Sydney (2024). His research and teaching focus on the social, cultural, and interactional aspects of Chinese language use in context. Among his over 150 publications are *Chinese under Globalization* (World Scientific, 2011), *Global Chinese Variation - USA* (Commercial Press 2022), and *Learner Corpora Construction and Explorations in Chinese and Related Languages* (Springer 2023). He serves on editorial boards of over 30 academic publications and was a former president of the Chinese Language Teachers Association, USA.

All Are Welcome

Enquiries

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