

A Comparative Study of the Word Class Problems between English and Chinese Light Verb Constructions

In recent years, Light Verb Constructions (LVCs) has become a hot topic in linguistics research (Brinton 2008; Butt 2010; Plante 2014). Existing studies mainly focus on the types of light verbs and deverbal nouns (Live 1973; Wierzbicka 1982), the syntactic and semantic characteristics of deverbal nouns and the entire construction (Stein 1991; Allan 1998), and the acquisition of LVCs (Tu & Roth 2011), and have achieved fruitful results. However, there are constant disputes about the word classes of the objects of light verbs in the study of LVCs in English and Chinese.

Although there is almost no controversy over heterosemous words with both verb and noun usages in the practice of English grammar description, and their representations in mainstream English dictionaries are relatively sound (Wang Renqiang, Wang Duan 2016), there are still some disputes in theoretical definition. Some hold that “functional shift as category underspecification” (Farrell 2001; Barner & Bale 2002), or give new names to exclude both categories, such as “NVs” (Hockett 1958: 227), “flexible words” (Luuk 2010), etc., and some scholars even insist that the words that act as objects of English light verbs (such as *look*, *laugh*, *stroll*, etc.) are still verbs, forming GIVE A VERB, HAVE A VERB and TAKE A VERB constructions respectively (Dixon 2005: 459).

In comparison, the word class of disyllabic words that can serve as the object of light verbs in modern Chinese is more difficult to define, reflecting greater disputes and conflicts both theoretically and practically. There are many related terms, such as “NVs” (Zhu Dexi 1982, 1985a, 1985b, 2010), “event noun” (Lu Bingfu 2012; Wu Huaicheng 2014), “verb-noun heterosemy” (Zhang Gaoyuan 2008: 61; Wang Renqiang, Yang Xu 2017), etc. Shen Jiakuan (2016: 62-63)’s “the Inclusive Model” even believes that all the verbs in Chinese function both as nouns and as verbs. Although most studies admit that those words with both verb and noun usages have typical characteristics of nouns (Zhu Dexi 1961, 1985b; Lu Bingfu 1981, 2009), most studies insist that all the Chinese verbs are multifunctional. It is obvious that a hasty generalization is made by saying that all the Chinese verbs instead of some frequently-used ones are multifunctional (Wang Renqiang & Yang Xu 2017) .

However, the research on the word class problems in Chinese LVCs is mainly based on theoretical speculation, lacking empirical investigations based on large corpus data, and also lacking in-depth theoretical explanations. In view of this, this paper will conduct a comparative study between English and Chinese LVCs to clarify the word class problems in LVCs and improve the quality of Chinese grammar description.

References

- Allan, Q. 1998. Delexical verbs and degrees of desemanticization[J]. *Word*, 49(1): 1-18.
- Barner, D., & Bale, A. 2002. No nouns, no verbs: Psycholinguistic arguments in favor of lexical underspecification [J]. *Lingua*, 112 (10): 771-791.
- Brinton, L. J. 2008. Where grammar and lexis meet: composite predicates in English [A]. In S. Elena & M. J. López-Couso (eds.). *Theoretical and Empirical Issues in Grammaticalization* (C). Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 33-53.
- Butt, M. 2014. The light verb jungle: Still hacking away [A]. In M. Amberber, B. Baker & M. Harvey (eds.). *Complex Predicates: Cross-linguistic Perspectives on Event Structure* [C]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 48-78.
- Dixon, R. M. W. 2005. *A semantic approach to English grammar* (2nd ed.)[M]. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Farrell, P. 2001. Functional shift as category underspecification [J]. *English Language and Linguistics*, 5(1): 109-130.
- Hockett, C. F. 1958. *A course in modern linguistics* [M]. New York: MacMillan.
- Jespersen, O. 1942. *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (VI) [M]. Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard.
- Live, A. H. 1973. The take-have phrasal in English [J]. *Linguistics*, 11 (95): 31-50.
- Luuk, E. 2010. Nouns, verbs and flexibles: Implications for typologies of word classes. *Language Sciences*, 32(3): 349-365.
- Plante, S. 2014. Types of nominalized verbs in light verb constructions [J]. *McGill Working Papers in Linguistics*, 24(1): 81-91.
- Sinclair, J. 1990. *Collins Cobuild English Grammar* [M]. London: Harper Collins.
- Stein, G. 1991. The phrasal verb type “to have a look” in modern English [J]. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 29(1): 1-29.
- Tu, Y. & D. Roth. 2011. Learning English light verb constructions: Contextual or statistical [C]// Kordoni, V., Ramisch, C. & A. Villavicencio. *MWE'11 Proceedings of the Workshop on Multiword Expressions: From Parsing and Generation to the Real World*. Portland: Association for Computational Linguistics. 31-39.
- Wierzbicka, A. 1982. Why can you have a drink when you can't *have an eat? *Language*, 58(4): 753-799.