

Delivery Event and Its Variants: A Cognitive-Functional Perceptive

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Using a data-driven method, the present study comparatively analyzed Chinese and English delivery verbs and their variants by theoretically formulating the conceptual content of delivery event, which is shared by all the delivery variants, and the conceptual meanings of specific Chinese and English delivery variants. Delivery events in Chinese and English share the same conceptual content and the corresponding variants in the two languages share the same conceptual meanings; from the major differences between the Chinese and the English delivery variants, i.e., the quantity of variants and the forms of grammatical expressions in the two languages, we could observe the basic difference between the two languages, that is, Chinese pays more attention to the meaning relative to the grammatical form and English emphasizes the grammatical form of the language.

Keywords: Cognitive-Functional Model, delivery event, variant, conceptual content, conceptual meaning

Introduction

The relationship between meaning and expression is one focus of contemporary linguistic research. Neuro-cognitive studies (e.g., Gallese & Lakoff, 2005) have shown that language expression system and sensory-motor system are connected; the connecting section is a part of experiential knowledge, which is called conceptual meaning in the Cognitive-Functional Model (Cheng, 2006; 2011). In the Cognitive-Functional Model, the meaning-expression relation lies in the symbolic embodiment relation between conceptual meaning and language expression. Conceptual meaning is the knowledge of experience, which is accumulated and formed in the processes of perceiving and interacting with the outer world and conducting social communication through language. Conceptual content is a system of conceptual meaning. Through world experiences, people would form a relationship network of an event, i.e., a scheme (Lowe, Baker, & Fillmore, 1997) in their mind, which contains the whole process of action implementation. It is formulated as the general conceptual content of an event in the Cognitive-Functional Model. Conceptual content of an event is not only related with sensory-motor system, but also construed as various delivery variants of the event.

Delivery event, as a principal component of human experience, is closely related with human lives; therefore, various patterns of actions are involved in this event. This variety should have its embodiment in

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linguistic expression system. Levin (1993) made a classification of delivery verbs from a lexical-semantic view and roughly described the relation between English delivery verbs and variants. Wei (2015) described the conceptual meanings of English send/carry verbs and drive verbs. So far, Chinese delivery verbs and variants have received little attention from linguists, and Chinese and English delivery verbs and variants have not been compared. Using a data-driven method, the present study attempts to comparatively analyze Chinese and English delivery verbs and their variants by theoretically formulating the conceptual content/meaning of them under the cognitive-functional perspective. In this paper, conceptual frames (Cheng, 2006; 2011) are constructed to formulate and explore the conceptual content of delivery event, which is shared by all the delivery variants, and the conceptual meanings of specific Chinese and English delivery variants.

Research Method

This paper adopts a data-driven method, and the study is carried out with the collection, classification, and analysis of corpus: (1) To select English and Chinese delivery verbs: Totally 54 English verbs are selected from five sub-classes of the 11th classes of verbs in Levin (1993)'s book: *English Verb Classes and Alternation*. These verbs are uniformly called the delivery verbs in this paper. Then, according to dictionary meanings, these English verbs are translated into their Chinese correspondence. Since one English verb may correspond to more than one Chinese meaning, totally we get 72 Chinese delivery verbs. (2) To collect variants of each English and Chinese delivery verb through the resources of authoritative English and Chinese dictionaries (e.g., *A Dictionary of Current English Verb Usage*, *A Dictionary of Chinese Verb Usage*), corpora, and website. (3) To abstract a list of all the variants that English delivery verbs can enter from the data collected in Procedure 2 and a list of Chinese variants. (4) To classify and entitle each variant in the list of Procedure 3.

It should be noted that these two lists of variants gotten through the above procedures are taken as typical variants of delivery event in Chinese and English, respectively.

Conceptual Content of Delivery Event

In this paper, "event" refers to the the relationship network of an event, which can be understood as the whole process of action implementation. The conceptual content of delivery event includes: the action of the actor, through the controlled instrument (i.e., out instrument, body parts of the actor, or body parts of a intermediary), deliver the object of the action, which would probably cause changes in the object in location, possession, or property. This conceptual content of delivery event is shared by both Chinese and English delivery verbs and variants, which could be represented in this general conceptual frame:

Actor + Delivery action + Instrument + Object
Causer + Cause + Patient + Final

Here the actor coincides with the causer and the object coincides with the patient. Verb is one part of a clause; according to the Cognitive-Function Model, verb meaning, which mainly expresses "carrying out of an action", is just one part of event meaning, which not only contains the verb meaning, but also implies the "possible changes caused by the action". As a consequence, the conceptual meaning of change is not a necessary result of delivery event, but a possible result of the event, which is marked as "final" in the frame.

Comparative Analysis of Chinese and English Delivery Variants

The above general conceptual frame formulates the conceptual content of delivery event, which is shared by all delivery variants. This conceptual content not only connects with sensory-motor system, but also can be construed as various delivery variants according to different patterns of delivery action.

Theoretically all participants of the event can become the topic of a variant, and three kinds are found in our data. They are actor, instrument, and object, with actor being the most commonly used topic. Generally, the actor would be the topic when the clause is in active voice, while the object or the instrument would be used when the actor is absent in the clause. This paper mainly focuses on actor-topiced delivery variants.

According to the data, delivery event could be construed as 13 typical English delivery variants and as seven typical Chinese delivery variants. Both Chinese and English variants can be grouped into two classes: the class of transitive action variants and the class of change in object variants. The elaborated conceptual frame representing the conceptual content shared by all the English and Chinese delivery variants is formulated as:

Actor + Delivery action + Instrument/Intermediary + Object + Accompaniment/Quantity
 Causer + Cause + Patient + (Original direction/Final direction/Original-final direction/Final location)/(Original direction/Final direction/Original-final direction/Final possession)/(Final property)

(“/” represents an optional relation.)

Compared with the general conceptual frame representing the conceptual content of delivery event, this elaborated frame contains intermediary, accompaniment, and quality; and the “final” is elaborated as location, possession, and property. According to the Cognitive-Function Model, the activation of different paths in the conceptual frame would be embodied as different grammatical structures.

The Class of Transitive Action Variants

This class of variants emphasizes “the delivery action of the actor involves the object”, while the conceptual content of change in object is weakened. The action of the actor may be conducted by certain instrument, through certain intermediary, with certain companion, or for certain quantity. In this class of conceptual frame, only the action conceptual structure is activated, and the causative conceptual frame is not.

Actor + Delivery action + Instrument/Intermediary + Object + Accompaniment/Quantity
 Causer + Cause + Patient + (Original direction/Final direction/Original-final direction/Final location)/(Original direction/Final direction/Original-final direction/Final possession)/(Final property)

(The bold part of the frame marks the possibly activated components.)

In the data, we found four typical English variants and three typical Chinese variants that belong to this class. The English variants include the transitive action variant, the instrument variant, the intermediary variant, and the companion variant. The transitive action variant just activates the actor, the delivery action, and the object. The instrument variant activates the actor, the delivery action, the object, and the instrument; the instrument is usually means of transportation, which is represented as *in/by* prepositional phrase. The intermediary variant activates the actor, the delivery action, the object, and the intermediary; the intermediary is another person who does the delivery action on behalf of the actor, which is represented as *through* prepositional phrase. The companion variant activates the actor, the delivery action, the object, and the person who accompanies the actor to do the action; the companion is represented as *with* prepositional phrase. For example:

Nora sent the book. (transitive action variant)

We conveyed our goods to market in/by an old car. (instrument variant)

Thank you for the book you sent me through Mrs. Emery. (intermediary variant)

Nora sent the book with her. (companion variant)

The Chinese variants include the transitive action variant, the instrument variant, and the quantity variant. The transitive action variant shares the same conceptual meaning with the English one; but in Chinese, the delivery action variant could be specially expressed as a repeated verb unit. The Chinese instrument variant shares the same conceptual meaning with the English one, but they are expressed differently; in Chinese, the instrument could be represented as a 用 + *vehicle* prepositional phrase before the delivery verb or as a noun after the verb. The quantity variant activates the actor, the delivery action, the object, and the quantity of the action. For example:

他给我传信。/帮我寄寄 (repeated verb unit) 钱吧。 (transitive action variant)

用车拉货。/寄航空。 (instrument variant)

他给我传了两回信。 (quantity variant)

Comparing the English variants and the Chinese variants in this class, there are the following points: (1) In English and Chinese, the transitive action variants and instrument variants share the same conceptual meaning, but are expressed by different grammatical structures. (2) There are two English variants, i.e., the intermediary and the companion variants, and a Chinese variant, i.e., the quantity variant, which do not appear as a typical variant in the other language. (3) The instrument, intermediary, and companion in related English variants are uniformly expressed as propositional phrases; the instrument and quantity in related Chinese variant are expressed flexibly by different grammatical structures other than propositional phrase; and the Chinese delivery action variant could be specially expressed as a repeated verb unit, which is rarely seen in English.

The Class of Change in Object Variants

This class of variants not only emphasizes the impact of delivery action on the object, but also overtly expresses the conceptual content of change in object. In this class of conceptual frame, both the action conceptual structure and the causal conceptual structure are activated. Delivery event may cause changes of the object in location, possession, and property. In the mental operation of delivery event, only one kind of change can be activated by a delivery action.

<p>Actor + Delivery action + Instrument/Intermediary + Object + Accompaniment/Quantity Causer + Cause + Patient + (Original direction/Final direction/Original-final direction/Final location)/(Original direction/Final direction/Original-final direction/Final possession)/(Final property)</p>

(The bold part of the frame marks the possibly activated components.)

In English, the typical variants indicating change in location include the original direction variant, the final direction variant, the original-final direction variant, and final location variant. The first three variants, which are expressed through *from*, *to*, and *from-to* prepositional phrase, emphasize the moving process of the object from the original position, to the final position, and that from the original to the final position, respectively, and do not clearly indicate whether the object finally reaches the target position. The final location variant emphasizes the ending of the change and clearly represents the conceptual meaning that the object has finally reached the target location, which is expressed as a double-objects structure. In Chinese data, we found a final

direction variant, which shares the same conceptual frame with the English one and is expressed as a Chinese pivotal structure (the structure contains two successive verbs, with the object of the first verb being the subject of the second verb). For example:

Nora brought the book from home. (original direction variant)

Nora brought the book to the meeting. (final direction variant)

Nora sent the book from Paris to London. (original-final direction variant)

He'll send home fifteen dollars next week. (final location variant/double-objects structure)

拾他上山。 (final direction variant/pivotal structure)

In English, the typical variants indicating change in possession include the original direction variant, the final direction variant, the original-final direction variant, and the final possession variant. The first three variants in the possession domain use the same titles with those in the location domain, which represent similar conceptual meanings and are expressed as the same language structures; the basic difference between the two groups lies in the entity of the final. The final possession variant emphasizes the ending of the change and the acquisition of the object by the target possessor, which is expressed as a double-objects structure; here the object can be physical substances and abstract things (such as information). In Chinese data, we found the final direction variant and the final possession variant. They share the same conceptual meaning with the English one, but are expressed quite differently from the English variants. In Chinese, the change of possession is mainly expressed by the double-objects structure and the verb-proposition structure. The double-objects structure in Chinese mainly embodies the final direction variant, rather than embodies the final possession variant as in English. Besides, the verb-proposition structure in Chinese could represent a final direction variant or a final possession variant, according to whether there is an auxiliary “了” placed after the verb phrase of the clause. For example:

Have you brought a message from her? (original direction variant)

Nora sent the book to Peter. (final direction variant)

This farm has been transferred from father to son for generations. (original-final direction variant)

Nora sent Peter the book./He wired me he was coming. (final possession variant/double-objects structure)

还他两本书。/传他一个好球。 (final direction variant/double-objects structure)

这本书寄给老师。 (final direction variant/verb-proposition structure)

那本书传在了小林手里了。/把球传他手里了。 (final possession variant/verb-proposition structure)

The Chinese auxiliary “了” is commonly used after the verb phrase of a clause to indicate the finish of an action or change, while the use of a verb phrase without “了” in a clause tends to emphasize the process of the action or change, with the meaning of finish unclear.

The English final property variant represents the final state of the object changed by the action of the actor, which is expressed as an adverb placed after the verb phrase. The Chinese final property variant shares the same conceptual meaning with the English one, but was expressed by the Chinese verb-resultative construction, which is composed of a verb and an auxiliary indicating the result of an action. For example:

They wheeled him away in an invalid chair. (final property)

他把球传没了。 (final property)

Comparing the English variants and the Chinese variants in this class, there are the following points: (1) There are more typical variants representing change of object in English than those in Chinese. (2) In English and Chinese, the final direction variant in the location domain, the final direction, and the final possession

variant in the possession domain, and the final property variant share the same conceptual meanings, but are expressed by different grammatical structures. (3) The conceptual meanings of English variants are expressed by relatively unified grammatical structures, e.g., propositional phrase embodies the direction of change, double-objects structure embodies the ending of location or possession change, and adverb phrase embodies the final property of the object, while the Chinese variants are expressed by special Chinese grammatical structures, e.g., the final direction variant in the location domain is expressed by a Chinese pivotal structure and the Chinese verb-proposition structure could represent a final direction or a final possession variant, according to whether there is an auxiliary “了” placed after the verb phrase of the clause.

Conclusion

Using a data-driven method, the present study comparatively analyzed Chinese and English delivery verbs and their variants by theoretically formulating the conceptual content of delivery event, which is shared by all the delivery variants, and the conceptual meanings of specific Chinese and English delivery variants. Based on data analysis and construction of conceptual frames, this study mainly comes to the following conclusion: (1) Chinese and English delivery events share the same conceptual content; but there are more English delivery variants (i.e., 13) relative to the Chinese variants (i.e., 7). (2) The seven Chinese delivery variants all have their correspondences in English, which share the same conceptual meanings with the English correspondences, but are expressed by different grammatical structures from the English variants. (3) English delivery variants are expressed by relatively unified structures, e.g., three English variants representing different patterns of transitive action and six English variants representing the change of object in location and possession are uniformly expressed by propositional phrases, and other English variants are expressed by double-objects structures and adverb phrases; Chinese delivery variants are expressed by various grammatical structures, many of which are special Chinese structures rarely seen in English, e.g., the repeated verb unit used to embody transitive action variant, the Chinese pivotal structure used to embody the final direction variant of location, the Chinese verb-proposition structure used to represent a final direction variant or a final possession variant, according to whether there is an auxiliary “了” placed after the verb phrase of the clause. (4) From the major differences between the Chinese and the English delivery variants, i.e., the quantity of variants and the forms of grammatical expression in the two languages, we may observe the basic difference between the two languages, that is, Chinese pays more attention to the meaning relative to the grammatical form of the language and English emphasizes the grammatical form of the language.

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