Semantics Perspective on Event Structure in Chinese “Shang Qu” (Go Up)

WANG Zhanming

[1] College of International Studies, Southwest University, China.
* Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Event structure theory has developed more than 50 years. Till now, it is still a focus in linguistics. It is used for what we have called situation type, that is, for the lexically encoded aspectual distinctions in verbs. The Chinese “shang qu” is a verb. Within event structure framework, this course paper mainly discusses how to use the theory to analysis this Chinese word.

Key words: Event; Event structure; Syntax; Shang qu; Verbs

INTRODUCTION

Before the 1980s, the focus of modern Chinese is the definition, name, attribution, range and functions of directional verbs. Many linguists mainly studied the internal similarities and individual difference of different words in the whole system from the perspective of category on a macroscale. From 1980s till now, however, linguists turned to study one or several words collating with other words and decompose the different entries from the perspective of grammar, semantics and pragmatics. But what they did not systematically analysis “shang qu” as the predicate head in projection of transitional event structure, and they did not analysis the semantic categories of all the concrete collocations as well as semantic restriction either. In this course paper, we only focus on the transition of the word “shang qu”, and the internal origin of “shang qu” as predicate head. Of course, all the studies are base on the perspective of event structure. We study this Chinese word “shang qu” through event structure. We use the concept of event structure to study the sentences made by this word.

1. OVERVIEW OF EVENT STRUCTURE

1.1 Definition

The word event of what we are talking about has two kinds: one is the event happens in the real word, the other is linguistic event. The former is those events that really happen in the real world, while the latter is the representation of the former (Rosen, 2003). Or, we can say linguistic event is the lexicalization of the real world event (Levin & Hovav, 2005). Because event has internal time structure, such as start, duration and end, it is called event structure.

The study of event structure originated from the study of verbs aspect structure. People classified verbs into different event types according to the internal time structure of verbs. Logical semanticists applied event as an argument of verbs to the study of formal semantics. Generative semanticists used predicate decomposition to decompose the verbs into several event structures made up of basic verbs. From then on, the study of verbs aspect structure was combined with the study of event meaning and study of syntax.

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Now, the theory of event structure is widely used to study in syntax and lexicon semantics interface. This approach is based on the study of the mapping from event structure to syntax. Because of the different research methods and theory backgrounds, the name of event structure differs, such as lexicon concept structure (Jackendoff, 1972, 1983, 1990), event structure (Voorst,
1988; Crimshaw, 1990; Levin & Hovav, 1995, 2005), semantic structure (Pinker, 1989), lexical relation structure (Hale & Keyser, 1993), logical structure (Van Valin & LaPlla, 1997; Van Valin, 2005), and lexical syntax (Travis, 2000) and so on.

1.2 The Origin of Event Structure
The lexical semanticists began to study the event types of verbs very early. Davison put the word event into the study of logical semantics, and those studies were applied to syntax study then event structure study came into being.

1.2.1 Aspect Structure Study of Verbs Meaning
Event structure study originated from the study of aspect structure of verbs in lexical semantics. In early times, the event usually refers to nonstative. Vendler (1967) claimed that the event refers to the verb of active, accomplishment and achievement. Parsons (1990) contended that the event specially refers to the verbs which have endpoints. Bach (1986) used eventuality to define all the aspect types which contain state and thing. Now, we usually use event rather than eventuality to refer to all the verb aspect types.

People have already recognized that verbs have internal time structure. Ryle (1949) classified verbs into thing, process and state. Kenny (1963) classified verbs into state, activity and accomplishment verbs according to semantic entailment. Vendler (1967) divided verbs into state, activity, accomplishment and achievement according to the tense of verbs, logical entailment and adverbs. Dowty (1979) combined verbs aspect structure with the study methods of generative semantics and applied to Montague grammar. Smith (1991) added semelfactive into Vendler’s study.

In the study of event types, researchers found that event types not only have something to do with attribute of verbs themselves, but also be relevant with some elements outside of verbs, such as appearance of objects, quantity, countable various, time adverbs and so on. That is to say, event types have modularity (Verkuyl, 1972; Dowty, 1979; Krifka, 1989). The difference of event types is to say, event types have modularity (Verkuyl, 1972; Dowty, 1979; Krifka, 1989). The difference of event types not only have something to do with attribute of verbs themselves, but also be relevant with some elements outside of verbs, such as appearance of objects, quantity, countable various, time adverbs and so on. That is to say, event types have modularity (Verkuyl, 1972; Dowty, 1979; Krifka, 1989). The difference of event types mainly due to difference of features of event meanings. But the features people use differ. Two of the most popular factor are duration and summative.

People distinguish event structure in order to identify all kinds of event with fewest event types. Those studies cannot interpret how event represents syntax. They, however, described relationship of event and basic feature of event objectively, and have prepared to explain how event structure represents syntax theoretically (Rosen, 2003).

1.2.2 Study in Event of Logical Semantics
The emerging of event structure partly owed to the study of logical semantics. In Donald Davison’s book The Logical Form of Action Sentences, he contended that according to necessity of logical entailment, event should be added in language logical formula. He added event argument in verbs argument, cancelled adverbial modification, in order to embody the entailment relationship. This is called Davison Analysis Approach.

Parsons (1990) improved Davison’s theory. He held the idea that the routine argument was independent from predicates, and only event argument belongs to predicate argument. The event argument was not only assigned to predicates and predicates modifiers, but also to thematic role modified by sub-predicate. Parsons viewed the thematic role as the connection between event and event participants, and applied it to semantic representation, thinking that every verb has only one event argument, and common argument and verbs modifiers all can take with event argument and all can be expressed in semantic representation through getting forms. Till then, event was put into argument structure.

1.2.3 Predicate Deconstruction and Embodiment of Event
The emergence of event structure on syntax is mainly originated from predicate deconstruction analysis of generative semantics. Through predicate deconstruction, verbs means are decomposed into several basic verbs, and they are represented into syntax. In 1960s, generative semanticists proposed that a word of surface can be represented by several deep-seated verbs. McCawley’s analysis draws intensive attention. He decomposed the verb ‘kill’ into four parts: “CAUSE, BECOME, NOT, ALIVE”. Jackendoff (1972) and Dowty (1979) did further study of lexical semantic on the framework of generative semantics, trying to connect semantic representation with syntax tree. Dowty found the relationship among different event structure. He regarded verbs as basic elements, adding three basic operators CAUSE, DO and BECOME to represent other event types, such as the logic expression ‘John broke the door’: [[ DO (a, [π, (a, … , a)], ) ] ] CAUSE [ BECOME [p(x, β, … , βan)] ] ]

People come to realized that verbs meanings can be explained as representation of event structure composed by verbs, and complex events possess inner structure which can be decomposed. They decompose complex events which are made up of perfective aspect verbs into sub-events which are made up of basic verbs. For example, the logic expression of ‘x closes the door’ (Parsons, 1990, p. 120) is
(Ee) (Cul (e) & Agent (e, x) & (Ee’) [ Cul (e’) & Theme (e’, door) & CAUSE (e’, e’) & (Es) [ Being-closed (s) & Theme (s, door) & Hold (s) & BECOME (e’, s) ] ])

Pustejovsky (1991, 1995) represented the relationship between event and sub-event, deeming that events which are represented by perfective aspect verbs are complex events. They are composed of process and state. Process is verb itself, and state is the result of verb.

The study of aspect structure mainly focus on single verb meaning, while the study of event semantics mainly focus on combination property explained by proposition. Former starts from verbs to sentences so that to find event structure features of verbs, while latter starts from sentences to verbs in order to represent semantic truth.
Those two approaches complement each other, and they combine with syntax study and finally form event structure theory.

1.3 Predicates Deconstruction and Concretization of Event

The emerging of event structure, in syntax, mainly comes from the predicate deconstruction analysis of generative semantics. Predicate deconstruction is to decompose the verbs meaning into several basic verbs and represent them on syntax tree. In the 1960s, generative semanticists proposed, that a word on the surface can be represented by several abstract verbs in deep. The pretty influence analysis is conducted by McCawley (1968). He divided the verb kill into four elements: CAUSE, BECOME, NOT, ALIVE. Jackendoff (1972) and Dowty (1979) conducted further study of lexical semantic deconstruction through the frame work of generative semantics, trying to connect semantic representation with syntax tree. Dowty found the relationship between different event types. He made stative verbs as basic elements, adding CAUSE, DO and BECOME to represent other event types.

People came to realize that verb meanings can be decomposed into event structure representation made up of verbs. Complex event has internal structure which can be decomposed, and they decomposed those complex event made up of perfect aspect verb into sub-event made up of basic verbs.

Pustejovsky (1991, 1995) represented the relationship between event and sub-event, thinking that those events represented by perfect aspect verbs are a complex event. It is made up of process and state. Process is the act itself, while the state is the result of the verb.

The significant of studying single verb from the perspective of aspect structure is to interpret the property of event semantics. All those studies mentioned combined with syntax study made event structure theory.

1.4 The Development of Event Structure

The study of event structure absorbs the achievement from lexical semantics and logical semantics and applies it to grammar study. In the 1980s, the study of representation from event structure to syntax was showed concern to. Those studies can be divided into two kinds. One is that event is represented from lexicon to syntax, the other is that event is directly represented in syntax.

1.4.1 From Lexicon to Syntax

After recognizing that lexical semantics can determine syntactic realization, event structure was widely used in lexical semantic representation which determines argument realization. However, linguists held different idea about what semantic property of event influence argument realization, and how do speakers conceptualize the real event. Three kinds of approach: Space Analysis Method, Aspect Analysis and Cause Analysis influence this field. These methods resort predicate deconstruction to decompose verbs into basic verbs. And basic verbs can take with argument, and verb arguments are represented to argument position of relevant verbs.

In Space Analysis, people think that the event which contains space movement and space is the center to construct all events, and all verbs can construal and move space verbs. Gruber (1965, 1976) applied this approach to event representation. Jackendoff (1972, 1983, 1990) conducted further formalization of the representation of event structure in this approach. He contended that events can be expressed by those verbs which are deconstructed such as GO, BE, STAY, CAUSE, FORM, TO and AT and so on.

Aspect analysis mainly consults the internal time property of predicate description event as argument representation. In this method, people think that subjects correspond with the start and reason of events, while the formal syntactic representation of objects correspond with summative ability, measurement and object. Tenny (1994) discussed a theory of the representation from verbs aspect to syntax, and constructed the relationship between bounded event and direct objects, and propose a very important hypothesis: Aspect Interface Hypothesis. Voorst (1988) mapped direct object with event summative point, and proposed that the start of event connect with subject.

Cause analysis thinks that event is the central concept which determines argument realization. Event is a series of cause chain which consist of cause factors. Every factor of cause chain connects two event participants. This approach described the mode of event structure and constructed the relationship between each event individuals.

Besides, Pinker (1989) thought that if children want to acquire argument structure, they have to figure out connection rule of semantics and syntax. And one of the rules is the acquisition of semantic structure. This structure contains event, state, thing, process and position and so on. Those concept are expressed by some basic verbs, and they have close relationship with grammar, and they can influence the transition of argument.

1.4.2 Directly Represent to Syntax

As event concept came into the field of formal semantics, those syntactic professors came to recognized that lexical semantics interact with pure syntactic structure. In the 1960s, event theory was applied to generative semantics. From then on, grammar went on to study how event structure represents to syntax.

VP subject hypothesis and Larson’s single complement hypothesis make verbs have more composability, and make correspondence between syntax structure with structured event clearer. Hale and Keyser’s theory ‘Lexical Relation Structure’ is mainly about how verb argument structure project from lexical core to syntax structure. Therefore, essentially, it belongs to syntax, namely, lexical syntax. They proposed that verb derived from noun and
verb derived from adjective experience core moving process in argument structure, according to Larson’s light verb theory and Baker’s consolidate theory. Hale and Keyser (1993) connected event structure with syntax structure, made light verbs have event semantic content, and made the position of argument can be predictive from structure. Huang (1997) expanded light verbs to all kinds of verbs, deeming that all kinds of verbs can be inlayed correspondent light verbs, and totally combine basic verbs with light verbs in event structure.

Verb phrase structure has inner structure, which provides theoretical evidence for representation structural event. More and more grammarians focus on relationship between function projection of sentence and event structure. People found that syntax control is sensitive to event structure, and starting and ending point of event can connect with case as well as consistence relation.

2. THE ANALYSIS OF THE CHINESE WORD “SHANG QU” IN WAYS OF EVENT STRUCTURE

2.1 Ending
The Chinese word “shang qu” means to go up. In other words, it means to move to the higher level. This word has orientation directivity. “shang qu” implicates that to go to some higher places and to go up. And this movement contains two kinds of single movement. One is to some where, the other is to upper place. “shang qu” is a Chinese verb, which constructs event with other entity. And it is about the moving image’s position change from lower place to higher place. This word not only refers to those concrete movements, but also refers to some abstract movements. In Chinese, if the altitude of the destination is higher than the place the speaker is standing, and the speaker wants to express that he or she wants to go to the destination, he or she can say “shang qu”. In this instance, “shang qu” dose not simply mean to go up, but means to move from one place to other place, and that place is higher than the start.

2.2 Process
In event types, there are three kinds of verbs; states, processes and transitions. “shang qu” is in the second kind. According to Pustejovsky (1992), processes are sequences of events identifying the same semantic expression. As for “shang qu”, the word itself is a process—from lower place to higher place.

CONCLUSION
Before and after “shang qu” can be added different entities of semantic categories, but different collocation are not all fit with entities. Even though languages in the world differ, the system of language concept sign is only one (Xu, 2006). In this course paper, we discussed “shang qu” in view of event structure. In the entry of moving in up direction of “shang qu”, the basic element about event structure contains move and destination. For different element, we have discussed different sub-categories.

REFERENCES