

包装名词与语篇信息包装

唐青叶 著

Packet
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in Discourse

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中文摘要

本书提出“包装名词”这一新概念。这类名词包括 claim、idea、observation、problem、question等，其功能是将事件（包括行为、过程、状态）、抽象关系（包括事实、观点、言语）以及这些事件和抽象关系所隐含的言外之意等语篇语段打包。本书把这种现象称为语篇信息包装。包装名词和信息包装类似于现实生活中的包装行为，这说明语言中的包装有其经验基础。包装在现实生活中无处不有。为了保护产品、方便储运以及促进销售，我们常常将产品进行包装。这种体验会映射到语言结构中，也就是说，语篇中大量块状、复杂的信息需要再次提及或预先提示，但由于大脑记忆的局限性，这些信息不能线性地再现，因而要用包装名词把这类信息包装。一个语段可从不同的角度包装，其结果是某些真实信息可能会被掩盖。再者，由于包装意味着把物品分类和分界，因此语篇结构和内容也就有范畴化和语类阶。由此可以看出，信息包装揭示了语篇与现实世界的象似性，即语言结构在很大程度上反映了人类的认知结构。

包装名词的“突现”展示了语篇自组织系统的运作，“突现”会不断产生新的语类变异和结构，从而使语篇的信息量不断增加。信息包装是语篇自组织系统与外在语篇环境相互作用的结果，既节省了脑力，又减少了冗余信息，从而保持着语篇结构的平衡与和谐，这说明了一种语言的句法一定程度上要对优化语篇信息流的压力做出回应。

尽管信息包装在语篇中很普遍，但却只被看作是一种衔接手段。实际上，它是人类处理复杂信息时经济性原则和范畴化的视角制约的体现。信息包装不只是一种单纯的语言现象，而是一种有效的认知和思维方式，所以提出包装名词和信息包装这两个概念有其理论意义。

为此，本书以系统功能语言学为理论框架从理论和实证两方面展开分析。在理论上，探讨了包装名词与被包装语篇之间的语义关系，从而建立了包装可发生在语言各个层次的假设。实证研究部分地证明

了这一假设，主要围绕三个方面展开，即分析读者对包装名词的认知状态、包装的语类特征以及新闻报道中的包装名词。

具体地说，由于信息包装涉及信息结构和信息流，也因为包装名词属于抽象名词范畴，所以本书首先对以往信息结构和抽象名词的研究做了学术史意义上的文献梳理。过去对信息结构的研究忽视了语篇中复杂庞大信息的传递方式，而抽象名词的传统研究只集中于其词汇、句法意义以及语篇照应功能。本书提出包装名词这一概念，并用信息包装把信息结构和抽象名词这两项研究自然架接。信息包装这一概念可从许多领域找到理论依据，如信息技术、认知科学、语言研究本身乃至现实生活。信息包装的语法型式可归纳为四大类，即包装名词、语篇指示语、文献包装和特殊概念包装等，其中包装名词是本书的主要研究对象。这些型式的使用是有理据的，象似性和经济原则为两大主要动因。

本书基于系统功能语言学的语法隐喻、情态和投射理论，提出信息包装是更高层次上的语法隐喻，因为它是从最高层的语篇到较低层的名词短语的隐喻性级转移。情态成分在语篇中普遍存在，这使得同一语篇包装具有多样性、主观性。投射是包装名词语义延伸的一种语法手段，投射范围就是包装所及的语义范围。通过这一语义分析，本书确立了信息包装的理论模式，即包装可发生在语言的所有层面，如书写、音系、词汇语法、语义、语用、语类和意识形态等。包装层面的多样性反映了作者对语篇内容介入的程度和包装的视角化。

这一理论假设在实证研究中部分地得到了验证。首先，对包装名词认知状态的研究证明了读者对被包装语篇的解码与作者的编码不完全一样，包装呈现出范畴连续体的特点。其次，本书考察了包装在戏剧对话、书面演讲、新闻报道和法律语篇四大语类中的差异，其结果显示某些包装词只在某一类语篇中频频出现，而且包装在不同语类中也有量的区别，这暗示了人类在处理数量庞大且内容繁杂的信息时认知方式的差异以及对包装词选择的优先性，不同的交际目的和信息复杂程度要求与其相对应的包装方式。最后，新闻报道中包装名词的个案研究证实了包装的视角制约性。由于新闻记者掌握了话语权，所以在介入他人话语时，会为了显示其权威地位而强化某些信息，或为了避免责任而抑制其它话语内容。

Abstract

This book proposes a new notion "packet nouns". Such nouns include *claim*, *idea*, *observation*, *problem*, *question* and so forth. Their function is to package a discourse segment such as events (including actions, processes and states of affairs), abstract relations (including facts, ideas and utterances), or what events and abstract relations bring about or imply. This linguistic phenomenon is called information packaging. Packet nouns and information packaging resemble the packaging act in the real life, which indicates that packaging in language has its experiential foundation. Packaging is pervasive in the daily life. In order to protect and carry goods, and promote the sale, we usually pack the goods properly with a series of technical and artistic handling. Such experience can be mirrored in language structure. That is to say, in discourse there is a large amount of chunked and complex information which needs to be re-expressed or predicted. However, due to the limited capacity of memory, such information cannot be re-mentioned linearly, and thus has to be packaged by packet nouns. A discourse segment can be packaged from different perspectives. The result is that some true information may be disguised. Furthermore, to package is to categorize and segment the goods. Therefore, discourse is characterized by the categorization and generic staging in structure and content. Accordingly, this book argues that information packaging reveals the iconicity between discourse and reality, which means that linguistic structure to a large extent reflects the human's cognitive structures.

The emergence of packet nouns shows the operation of self-organizing system in discourse. It constantly produces a new generic variation and structure, accordingly, increasing the discourse information. Information packaging is the interaction between the discourse self-organizing system and its external environment, which not only economizes the mental energy, but also reduces the redundant information. Consequently, it keeps the balance and harmony of the discourse structure. This illustrates that the syntax of a language comes about largely as a response to discourse pressure to optimize information flow.

Though information packaging is pervasive in discourse, it is only regarded as a cohesive device. In fact, it is the actualization of economy principle and the perspectival constraint on categorization when the humans handle complex information. It is more than a pure linguistic phenomenon, but an efficient way of cognition and thinking. In this sense, it is theoretically rewarding to put forward the two concepts of packet nouns and information packaging.

In this light, this book, under the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, is both theoretically and practically oriented. Theoretically, it probes into the semantic relationship between packet nouns and their packaged stretches of discourse, and as a result, establishes the hypothesis that packaging may occur at all strata of language. The practical study partially testifies the above hypothesis. It focuses on three aspects, namely the cognitive status of packet nouns in the readers' mind, the generic features of packaging, and packet nouns in news reports.

More specifically, because information packaging is concerned with information structure and information flow, and also because packet nouns belong to the category of abstract nouns, this book begins with the literature reviews of information structure and

abstract nouns. The previous studies of information structure ignore the manner of transmission in discourse when the information is too complex and overloading. Meanwhile, the traditional studies of abstract nouns only center on their lexical or syntactic meanings, and textual cohesive functions. This book proposes the new concept of packet nouns, and bridges the gap between the two researches of information structure and abstract nouns with information packaging. The idea of information packaging is theoretically supported by many areas, such as information technology, cognitive science, the language study proper and even the real life. The grammatical patterns of information packaging fall into four types, namely packet nouns, discourse deixis, document packaging, and ad hoc conceptual packaging, among which packet nouns are the main target of the present study. The uses of these patterns are motivated. Iconicity and economy principle are the two major motivations.

This book, based on the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics in terms of grammatical metaphor, modality and projection, argues that information packaging is a higher level of grammatical metaphor, because it is the metaphorical rankshift from the highest rank of discourse to the lower rank of nominal group. Modal elements are pervasive in any discourse, which makes possible the variety and subjectivity of the same discourse packaging. Projection is the grammatical means for the meaning extension of packet nouns, and the projecting scope is the semantic scope of packaging. With such a semantic analysis, this book aims to establish a theoretical model of information packaging, that is, packaging may occur at all the strata of language, namely graphology, phonology, lexicogrammar, semantics, pragmatics, genre and ideology. The variety of the packaging strata reflects the degrees of the writer's involvement in discourse content and the

perspectivization in packaging.

The above hypothesis is partially testified in the practical research. First, the study of the cognitive status of packet nouns proves that the readers' decoding of the packaged discourse is not the same as the encoding of the writer and that packaging is characterized by a cline of categorization. Second, this book examines the generic differences in packaging among four genres, namely dialogues in the drama, speeches, news reports and legal texts. The results indicate that some packet words only frequently occur in certain genres, and that packaging has a quantitative difference in genres. These findings imply that there is a difference in cognitive manners and also the priority over packet words when human beings deal with complex information. Different communicative purposes and different degrees of information complexity require corresponding packaging styles. Finally, the case study of packet nouns in news reports tests out the perspectival constraint on packaging. Because the reporter holds the power of discourse, when he is engaged into others' utterance, he may enhance certain information to show his authoritative status, or suppress other utterance content to avoid responsibility.

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Introduction

This part will present the background of the current study, the objectives, methodology, data collection and organization of this book.

1. Background

This book proposes a new notion “packet nouns” to designate their functions of packaging large chunks of information of the previous or ensuing discourse. ① This linguistic phenomenon is then called information packaging. Information packaging in language is iconic with packaging in the real life, just as we pack goods with packets or put goods into a container. This indicates that packaging in language has its experiential foundation. The examples of packet nouns are *claim*, *idea*, *observation*, *problem*, *question*, *fact*, *point*, and *reason*, and also those metaphorically construed entities used for packaging. The process of packaging involves the relationship between the packet noun and its packaged discourse. The point that this book intends to argue for is that, linguistically, information packaging is a higher level of grammatical metaphor, because it is different from the rankshift from clause complex to clause, or from clause to nominal group. Packaging is realized by the

① Scholars hold different views on the distinction between “discourse” and “text”. This study does not set any clear-cut line between the two notions. They are interchangeably used, referring to the written or spoken language for the convenience of writing or collocation. “Utterance” is used sometimes.

metaphorical shift from the highest rank of discourse to the lower rank of nominal group. It is an important pattern of cognitive processing of complicated information.

Consider the following three different language phenomena.

First, we will examine an interaction between a 7-year-old boy and his father:

- (1) Son: If there weren't trees on the earth, um earth, we would all be dead, 'cos there wouldn't be oxygen; trees make oxygen, so we can breathe, so if we had heaps of trees around us, it produces heaps of oxygen, so we can breathe; so trees, big trees, are really good because heaps of oxygen comes out of them.

Father: So that is *the argument* for having trees around us.

(Matthiessen 2001: 235 My italics, here and in later examples)

The son quite effortlessly produces a long sequence of reasoning and the father then categorizes this passage as an *argument*, using a relational clause where an extended text reference, *that*, is equated with a nominalization, *the argument for having trees around us*. Nominalization is "the single most powerful resource for creating grammatical metaphor" (Halliday 1994: 352). Differently, here nominalization has its original discourse to be tracked, and the long portion of discourse is metaphorically shifted into a noun, which comes to constitute a textual package.

Another incident mentioned by Halliday (1985: 95) is that the child, Nigel, has told his mother a long story about a double-decker bus. Nigel's mother says, "Those are very interesting observations", to which Nigel retorts: "What does she mean by observations? —

there are no double decker observation coaches.” The child does not quite understand the abstract noun^① *observation* in this context, because this language of “events into things” removes from the concrete world of experience, and poses problems for young children. It is clear that they have difficulty in decoding and using summarizing-like packet nouns in communication. The adult language learners may also have difficulty in identifying such packet nouns.

The third example is:

- (2) A Prudent employer will incorporate a non-competition clause in its employment agreements. This offers no problem during the period of employment. However, employers often desire to prevent competition by an employee after termination of the employment. *This desire* clashes with the public policy of the law, which is opposed to any restriction that hinders an ex-employee from earning a livelihood. For *that reason*, post-employment non-competition clauses will, generally, only be held valid if they are limited as to territory and in time. (Chen 2003: 326)

In contrast to the nominalization *this desire*, the accessibility of *that reason* is more difficult because there is no lexical or even contextual cue to indicate that the previous discourse is a “reason”. The origin of that discourse as a “reason” is not from the packaged discourse itself, but from the surrounding discourse.

① Not all abstract nouns can be used to package discourse. Therefore, a new term *packet nouns* is coined for this function. Anyhow, because packet nouns are one category of abstract nouns, the literature review still keep this traditional term. Moreover, some other lexical items which can package discourse are accordingly called packet words.