

# 汉语违实成分研究

*The Ingredients of Counterfactuality*

*in Mandarin Chinese*

王宇婴 著



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## 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

汉语违实成分研究 / 王宇婴著. —北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 2013. 12

ISBN 978 - 7 - 5161 - 3824 - 3

I. ①汉… II. ①王… III. ①汉语—研究 IV. ①H1

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2013)第 310082 号

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出 版 人 赵剑英  
责任编辑 王 茵  
责任校对 王有学  
责任印制 王 超

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出 版 中国社会科学出版社  
社 址 北京鼓楼西大街甲 158 号(邮编 100720)  
网 址 <http://www.csspw.cn>  
中文域名:中国社科网 010 - 64070619  
发 行 部 010 - 84083685  
门 市 部 010 - 84029450  
经 销 新华书店及其他书店

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印 刷 北京君升印刷有限公司  
装 订 廊坊市广阳区广增装订厂  
版 次 2013 年 12 月第 1 版  
印 次 2013 年 12 月第 1 次印刷

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开 本 710 × 1000 1/16  
印 张 19.25  
插 页 2  
字 数 296 千字  
定 价 58.00 元

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(项目编号: RPP/ESLT-01/2013)



# Abstract

This book studies the realization of conditional counterfactual meaning in Mandarin Chinese. It first identifies lexical items and syntactic expressions that contribute, explicitly or implicitly, to the formation of counterfactual meaning (such expressions being termed “counterfactual ingredients” in this work). It then provides semantic and pragmatic analysis to the role played by each ingredient in the realization of counterfactuality. Based on the analyses of these ingredients, the book finally attempts to give a global semantic-pragmatic account of the process of counterfactual interpretation. Our purpose here is to prove that in Chinese, there are indeed linguistic components that can result in counterfactuality, but they only constitute part of the counterfactuality generating system, which can construct other counterfactual meanings, in some cases via accessing multiple layers of contexts.

Some major Chinese counterfactual ingredients examined here include temporal elements, hypothetical conjunctions, negators, rhetorical questions, personal pronouns and counterfactual enhancers. It is claimed that unlike the seemingly complicated manifestations, which appear to be assorted and scattered in grammatical or lexical realizations, counterfactual ingredients fall into two categories, those which contribute to factual meaning and those which contribute to negation:

FACTUAL	temporal expressions, personal pronouns, rhetorical questions, counterfactual enhancers
NEGATION	negators

Counterfactuality in Chinese can be achieved mainly through time-distancing and negation. Some temporal expressions, such as *zao* (早) and *le* (了), are used to create a time-distancing effect, project an imagined event time *E* that is removed from the real event time. *E* is only vaguely projected, i. e. being unspecific in time. Negating the current and factual can transport language users to a different possible world; a world as similar to the actual world as possible, with one exceptional difference introduced by the protasis.

Another interesting finding we have made during the process of the research is that although counterfactual conditionals are well accepted as a typical example of irrealis, some of the ingredients that are studied here, such as temporal expressions and negators (*bushi* (不是) and *meiyou* (沒有), which are more frequently used than *bu* (不)) are always applied to realis occasions. It can be concluded that counterfactual in Chinese is an example of realization of irrealis through partial realis representations.

Based on the analysis of individual counterfactual ingredients, we reach an overall account of counterfactuality in Chinese conditional sentences. We argue that the interpretation of a counterfactual conditional may be established via accessing three layers of contexts. A local context is formed when one or several of the counterfactual ingredients are exploited in a conditional sentence. The second layer of context is what we call compound sentence context, which refers to the interpretation of the protasis and the apodosis. It is argued in the book that it is the counterfactual ingredients in the protasis, rather than those in the apodosis, which play a dominant role in deciding the reading of a conditional sentence. Finally a macro context, or discourse context. It could be the information provided by the previous content, or general knowledge, or even observable features about the immediate physical environment on the spot or about the interlocutors. These three contexts interact with one another.

The advantage of developing such an account of the counterfactual conditionals and their intuitive truth-condition lies in mainly two aspects. First, counterfactual ingredients are no longer trivial and some of them which were once taken as redundant can be successfully categorized either to be a factive element or a negation element, and thus can all be incorporated into the system of counterfactual interpretation. Second, based on the indexical analysis of the protasis and the apodosis, we can even prove that the counterfactual fallacies are not fallacies at all, if the context remains the same.

# Foreword

Studies of counterfactual conditionals have accumulated a vast literature, boosting some of the most stimulating achievements in philosophy and linguistics. <sup>①</sup>Works in philosophy of language lay the foundations to our understanding of CFC, such as Gauker (2005), Goodman (1983), Jackson (1987), Kratzer (1981), Lycan (2001), Rescher (2007), Stalnaker (1968, 1975), and in particular, Lewis (1973, 1986). These logically highly sophisticated works have been made more accessible through elucidations of textbooks or surveying studies such as Bennett (2003), Gärdenfors (2007), X. Li (2003), and Sanford (2003).

Among the numerous linguistic studies, I wish to mention works included in Traugott et al. (eds.) (1986), <sup>②</sup>works in Athanasiadou & Dirven (eds.) (1997), <sup>③</sup>Iatridou (2000), <sup>④</sup>Smith & Smith (1988), <sup>⑤</sup>and von Stechow (2001). <sup>⑥</sup>

Recent dissertations in formal semantic and logic studies, such as Arregui (2005), Djordjević (2005), Huitink (2008), Ippolito (2002), Krakauer

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<sup>①</sup> For ease of exposition, “counterfactual” is henceforth abbreviated to CF, and “CF conditionals”, to CFC.

<sup>②</sup> Esp. its papers on the semantics of CF.

<sup>③</sup> Esp. its papers on cognitive studies of time-distancing.

<sup>④</sup> Which gives a detailed analysis of features that contribute to CFC in the tradition of formal syntax.

<sup>⑤</sup> Which provides a relevance-theoretic account of CFC.

<sup>⑥</sup> Which develops a detailed dynamic analysis of the semantics of CFC.



(2012) and Moss (2009), also offer up-to-date overviews and new developments.

The above studies are mainly based on Indo-European languages, more often on the properties of English. Studies on Chinese CFs, including CFCs, have been at best sporadic and unsystematic. The first concentrated study was reported in Bloom (1981) as an investigation in psychology. Then came some more linguistics-oriented works such as Chen (1988), Paris (1999), and Jiang (2000). Chinese CFCs appear to be so different from their counterparts in Indo-European languages. They lack the morphological fake-tense features or subjunctive-conditional markers prevalent in Indo-European languages. The “*iffy*” words heading the protasis of CFCs are no different from those for indicative conditionals. At first look, and in the eyes of non-native speakers, every Chinese conditional seems to be an open conditional, relying on the contingent information in context to determine whether the protasis is contrary to fact or not. This is the view of Bloom (1981), which also reflects the general impression in the field of Chinese linguistic studies. As the picture of CFC has been found murky in Chinese, not many works have been produced in the final two decades of the twentieth century. It was not an active topic of inquiry, either because there are not enough identifiable grammatical features that can be observed, or because many linguists were under the impression that factors related to Chinese CF were too heterogeneous to attempt serious and unitary studies. However, Chen (1988), an earlier and somewhat neglected work, takes note of the unusual use of the perfective aspect marker LE in the protasis which contributes to the reach of CF of the Chinese conditionals. Jiang (2000), inspired by the works of Smith & Smith (1988) and Iatridou (2000), further pursues the ideas in Chen (1988) and identifies a range of features that contribute to CF. These features, in addition to the perfective marker LE, include sentential adverbs such as ZHENDE (really), sentential negators, and the occurrence of the perfect marker LE in the apodosis. Jiang (2000) also holds the view that no feature is deterministic of CF reading in

Chinese and that every feature only weakly contributes to contextual pragmatic inferences towards CF. To cite parallel evidence from other languages, Jiang(2000), following Smith & Smith(1988), enumerates examples in English indicative conditionals that can also give a CF reading, such as (1) and (2). Jiang observes that even the use of subjunctive conditionals in English can convey a highly hypothetical meaning, not an absolute CF reading, as in the English hypothetical remarks typically used by scientists and detectives, given here as (3) and (4), the latter cited from Barwise(1986).

(1) If you are the King, then I am the Queen.

(2) If 2 plus 2 is 5, ...

(3) If you had put these agents into the test-tube, you would have smelt something strange.

(4) If Oswald had not killed JFK, someone else would have. ( Uttered by the alleged conspirator who had planned the assassination of JFK, years after the event. )

Taken the above examples into consideration and echoing the views of Smith & Smith(1988) and Iatridou(2000), both of claiming that CF is implicature instead of literal meaning, Jiang(2000) makes the observation that CF meaning is context-relative both in Chinese and in English. This is probably an over-statement, as there are also very clear-cut cases of marked CF for English. Jiang(2000) also leaves an issue unaddressed; how is Chinese CF comprehended, given the presence of the set of assorted weak features.

The study of Chinese CF then became quiet for some time until after 2005, when there appeared quite a few doctoral dissertations studying related issues such as irrealis, the typology of Chinese conditionals, and conditional perfection, e. g. M. Li(2006), X. Luo(2006), J. Luo(2007), Zhang(2008), X. Wang(2007 and 2009), C. Wong(2007), Peng(2009), and C. Wang(2009). Almost all such works touch on Chinese CFC and contain critiques of Chen(1988) and Jiang(2000). Most of them are couched in the frameworks of cognitive linguistics and typology studies. These concentrated stud-

ies, though not directly on CFC, have contributed to a better understanding of the phenomena related to CF, especially irrealis and its grammatical features in Chinese.

It is against this background that Maggie, Wang Yuying conducted her new investigation on Chinese CFC. In Wang's dissertation completed in 2012, which is now published as this monograph, a fuller array of features, now termed "weak features", is identified that contribute to the CF reading in Chinese conditionals. Other than the ones already discussed in Chen (1988) and Jiang (2000), the new features that receive treatments are ZAO (early 早), YAO-BU-SHI (if-not-be 要不是), more uses of LE (ASP 了) as the perfective aspect marker in the protasis and apodosis, first person perspective, and meta-pragmatic or contextual negation of protasis. Moreover, the CF readings of conditionals are found to be reliant, not just on the occurrence of some such features, but also on their more subtle distributions. Some important examples are listed below:

(5) 要是你去了, 就不会不注意他那漂亮的太太的。

Yaoshi	ni	qu	le,	jiu	bu	hui	bu
If	you	go	LE(ASP),	then	not	will	not
zhuyi	ta	na	piaoliang	de	taimai	de.	
see	hethat	pretty	DE	wife	SFP.		

"If you had been there, you would not have failed to notice his pretty wife."

(6) 如果我早知道他不来, 我也不会来了。

Ruguo	wo	zao	zhidao	ta	bu	lai,	wo
If	I	early	know	he	not	come,	I
ye	bu	hui	lai	le			
also	not	will	come	LE(ASP).			

"If I knew it earlier that he would not come, I would not come"

either. ”

(7) 要是换了我的话,就不会对他这么客气了。

Yaoshi huan le wo de hua, jiu buhui  
If change LE(ASP) me SFP, then not will  
zheme keqi le . dui ta  
so nice LE(ASP). to him

“If I were to deal with this matter, I would not be so nice to him. ”

(8) 要不是张先生极力劝阻,他很可能会发大脾气呢。

Yaobushi zhangxiansheng jili quan zu, ta hen  
If-not-be Mr. Zhang make-effort dissuade, he very  
keneng hui fa da piqi ne.  
likely will get big temper SFP.

“If it had not been the case that Mr. Zhang managed to dissuade him, he might have got himself into a big temper. ”

(5), (6) and (7) all strongly favour a CF reading, due to the functioning of the weak features. In (5), it is the LE in the protasis interacting with the double-negation in the apodosis that yields CF. In (6), it is the ZAO (early) in the protasis interacting with the LE in the apodosis that yields CF. In (7), the speaker-oriented shifted perspective creates the I-as-the-impersonator hypothesis, yielding CF as a result. (8) is somewhat different. There, the negated and contracted ‘iffy’ expression YAO-BU-SHI (if not be) is found to be the only CF marker in Mandarin. But the marker is not a compulsory one for CF, and its usage is rather limited. For example, it cannot be used to construct CFC without making reference to a factual event.

More findings about the relationship between negation and CF meaning in Chinese are reported in Wang’s work. Negating the current and factual can transport language users to a different possible world; a world as similar to the actual world as possible, with one exceptional difference introduced by the

protasis. YAO-BU-SHI (if-not-be) is one grammaticalized or lexicalized means for such a negation. Contraposition is another one. FOUZE (否则 otherwise), BU-RAN-DE-HUA (不然的话 otherwise) and YAO-BU-RAN (要不然 otherwise), are also synonymous expressions that can be considered as shortened protasis of a CFC, whose meaning, minus negation, can be anaphorically recovered in the discourse. However, the current and factual can also be negated with no presence of overt negators or negative constructions. Hence stating the contrary-to-fact with a positive sentence can sometimes be an adequate means for expressing CF meaning. In such cases, contextual negation can be inferred through pragmatic inference.

CF features in Mandarin Chinese resemble deictic features in language. Both spread across a range of grammatical categories. Features from both the categories provide varying degrees of semantic contributions rather than clear-cut characterizations. It is therefore important to propose principled mechanisms that can give explanations to the working of the features as a whole. While attempting to offer more insightful theorization, we also need to keep on trying to characterize the CF features with more accuracy and precision. Wang's work is a firm step forward towards both these goals.

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It has been my pleasure to discuss issues on CFC with Maggie Wang over the past four years. It is now an even greater pleasure for me to see Maggie's efforts bear fruits. I hope the readers will find her work interesting and will agree with me that she took counterfactuals very seriously.

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# List of Abbreviations

ASP	aspect marker
BA	marker of <i>ba</i> construction
BEI	passive marker <i>bei</i>
CL	classifier
DE	pre-nominal modification marker or postverbal resultative marker <i>de</i>
GUO	experiential aspect marker <i>guo</i>
EMP	emphatic particle
EXP	experiential aspect marker
JIANG	marker of <i>jiang</i> construction
LE	perfective marker
NEG	negative morpheme
PERF	perfective aspect marker
PROG	progressive aspect marker
PRT	particle
RES	resultative complement
ZHE	progressive aspect marker <i>zhe</i>
*	ungrammatical structure
1S	first person singular pronoun
1PL	first person plural pronoun
2S	second person singular pronoun
2PL	second person plural pronoun
3S	third person singular pronoun
3PL	third person plural pronoun