

The “*X SHI X, keshi Y*” Construction in Mandarin: A Construction Grammar
Perspective*

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Abstract

SHI in Mandarin Chinese has been the focus of research due to its wide range of application, and the particular interest of it falls on the comparison of the Chinese “*SHI...DE*” construction and the English it-cleft construction (Chu 1981, Li & Li 1994). However, there exists another special construction of SHI entitled to receive equal attention, that is, “*X SHI X, Ke-shi Y*” (*XSXKY* hereafter). By investigating its syntactic properties and semantic generalizations, this paper intends to demonstrate *XSXKY* as a whole constitutes a constructional idiom in Construction Grammar (Langacker 1987, Goldberg 1992a, Fillmore, Kay, O’Connor 1997, Taylor 2003). Moreover, in light of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985, 1994; Verhagen 2000) the concessive relation between X and Y is suggested to be classified into three types with each characteristic of a cross-space contradiction, which better accounts for the concessivity in *XSXKY* than “incausality”, that is, the counteraction of a causal link. (König 1991).

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1. Introduction

For a long time, SHI in Mandarin Chinese has been the focus of research due to its wide range of application, with much attention paid to its origin, distribution, and function (Chu 1970, Yen 1986, Zhu 1997, among others). Within this trace of investigation, a construction with SHI as its partially filled lexical item, namely, “*SHI...DE*”, is frequently compared with the English it-cleft construction since they both invoke a pragmatic focus (see Chu 1981, Li & Li 1994). Examples in (1) and the English translations would suffice to illustrate their close correspondence.

- (1) a. 他是從鄉下來的。
'It's from the countryside that he's come.'
b. 她是去年生小孩兒的。
'It was last year that she had the baby.' (Yue-Hashimoto 1993:28-29)

There exists, however, another special expression of SHI entitled to receive equal attention, if not more. Consider (2), where a concessive reading can be recognized. Concession has long been considered related to causation and thus described to express “incausality” (König 1991a), that is, the counteraction of a causal link. Nevertheless, “incausality” in fact cannot fully account for all the sentences in (2). As a result, in this paper we endeavor first to demonstrate the expression “*X SHI X, keshi Y*” (hereafter XSKY) as a whole constitutes a “form-meaning pair”, or specifically a CONSTRUCTIONAL IDIOM in Construction Grammar (see Langacker 1987, Goldberg 1992a, Fillmore, Kay, O'Connor 1997, Taylor 2003), and subsequently to scrutinize the concessive relation in XSKY in light of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985, 1994; Verhagen 2000).

- (2) a. 在家是在家，可是他不想見你。
b. 信寫是寫了，可是還沒寄出去。
c. 她看書是看書，可是只看愛情小說。 (Zhu 1997: 109)
d. 東西貴是貴，可是品質很可靠。
e. 快是不快，可是很安全。 (Sinica Corpus)

The organization of this paper is as follows: as the departure of discussion, Section 2 reviews some previous works on constructions; Section 3 presents some evidences for the idiomaticity of XSKY in terms of its syntactic properties and semantic generalizations; Section 4 investigates the concessive relation that holds between X and Y; finally Section 5 summarizes the discussion and puts forward some

suggestions for further research.

2. Literature Review

Since late twenties, many linguists (Langacker 1987, Goldberg 1992a, Fillmore, Kay, O'Connor 1997, Taylor 2003) have started to explain linguistic phenomena by means of a Construction Grammar (CG) approach. Among them, Goldberg (1992a) is the first to give a formal definition of construction, which is given in (3). According to the definition, construction is an idiosyncratic configuration whose meaning is not totally predictable from its composing elements.

(3) *C is CONSTRUCTION iff_{def} C is a form-meaning pair, $\langle F_i, S_i \rangle$ such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts.* (Goldberg, 1992a)

After Goldberg, Taylor (2003: 561) defines construction as “any linguistic structure that is analyzable into component parts.” By this definition any level of linguistic constituent can be a construction, even though its properties are predictable from its composing elements. Unlike Goldberg, who focuses on the idiomaticity of a construction, Taylor emphasizes its compositionality. In a broad sense, CG views language form as a lexicon-syntax continuum, stretching from vocabulary to idiom and from phrases to sentences, with any point within the continuum being a construction.

In spite of this large picture, more appealing constructions are multiword expressions whose meanings cannot be derived or predicted from its composing elements, that is, CONSTRUCTIONAL IDIOMS. Constructional idioms roughly fall into three types by the degree to which their composing elements are specified, including lexical idioms, formal idioms, and partially filled idioms, that is, a hybrid of the first two types. (cf. Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor's typology of idiomatic expressions)

First, a lexical idiom is an idiom each of whose elements is specified and normally allows no variation. For instance, the idiom “spill the beans”, which means “to reveal secret information, especially without intending to do so,”¹ has three lexical words as its composing parts. It is impossible to derive the meanings of (4a)² unless we know what “spill the beans” as a whole means. What's more, (4b) is not interpretable at all

¹ The definition is from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 5th Edition.

² The example is taken from Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms.

even though peapods and seeds are quite similar to beans. In Mandarin, idioms of this type are usually four-character fixed expressions, such as those related to beans in (5)³. None of the four characters in each idiom reveals us its conventional meaning, though it does serve as a clue for its possible meaning.

- (4) a. She threatened to spill the beans about her affair with the president.
*b. She threatened to spill the peapods/seeds about her affair with the president.
- (5) a. 寸馬豆人：一寸大的馬與如豆般大的人。形容繪畫中人物的微小。
b. 榆暝豆重：食榆使人久睡，食大豆使人發胖。形容人的本性難改。
c. 瓜剖豆分：瓜被剖開，豆從筴中分裂而出。比喻國土被併吞、分割。

Second, in contrast to lexical idioms, formal idioms specify the form, or the “schema”, rather the content that their composing elements should assume. A representative formal idiom in English is the “Incredulity Response Construction”. In (6) are some instantiations of this construction, taken from Taylor (2003: 568). They all share some common formal properties and a particular communicative function that pertains to this construction, as shown in (7).

- (6) a. Him write a novel?!
b. Me worry?!
c. My boss give me a raise?!
- (7) Incredulity Response Construction
a. Formal Aspect:
Subj[oblique] + Pred[non-finite]
b. Communicative Aspect:
“The possibility [of a situation that] has previously been mentioned or hinted at being true is dismissed as absurd.” (Taylor 2003: 569)

Formal idioms can also be seen in Mandarin, for example, Double Object Construction (DOC) and Comparative Double-Object Construction (CDOC). Ahrens (1994) argues that DOC in Mandarin conveys “a central sense of transfer” that can go in two directions, either from the subject to the object (8a) or from the object to the subject (8b), depending on the verb. The formal properties in DOC are quite similar to those in CDOC since both require two object NPs. Chang *et al.* (1996) compares these two constructions and concludes that “Even though some constructions may surface

³ These Chinese idioms and their explanations are from the Online Dictionary of Chinese Idioms, available at <http://140.111.1.22/clc/chengyu/cgi-bin/mandarin/count.cgi>, which is constructed by the Ministry of Education.

as the same syntactic structure, such as the comparative double-object construction and double-object construction, they exemplify different meaning representations.” (quoted from Chen 2001:18) For illustration, in (9) (adapted from Chang *et al.* 1996: 234) the semantic interpretation of the verb in (9a) for CDOC is associated with comparison and gradability while that of the same verb in (9b) for DOC involves transfer of object, though they exhibit similar formal properties as shown in (10) and (11) respectively.

- (8) a. 我給他一瓶酒。
 b. 我抽他一根煙。
 (9) a. 他贏了慧芳三十公分。
 b. 他贏了我們三百塊。

(10) Comparative Double-Object Construction:

Subj + Pred + NP1 + NP2 [scale]

(11) Double Object Construction:

Subj + Pred + NP1 + NP2 [entity]

Third, situated between lexical and formal idioms are partially filled idioms, or hybrid of the first two types. Kay and Fillmore (1999) present a detailed analysis of the “What’s X doing Y Construction” (WXDY), which includes three lexical items (what, doing and the verb *be*) and two variables (X and Y). As demonstrated in (12) (Kay and Fillmore’s examples), X is normally a referential nominal and Y an adjunct. Instances of this construction express a “judgment of incongruity”, that is, X’s being in the situation indicated by Y is bizarre to some perceiver of the event. As for hybrid idioms in Mandarin, Chen (2001) claims to be constructional idioms a group of four-character expressions in the form of X-Lai (come)-X-Qu(go) or X-Lai(come)-Y-Qu(go), as shown in (13) and (14). Its constructional meaning is that the action identified by X/Y is repeated over and over again, though only one-time completion is coded (since come-and-go counts as a period).

- (12) a. What’s this fly doing in my soup?
 b. What was he still doing in the tool shed?
 c. What are you doing eating cold pizza?
 (13) X-Lai-X-Qu:
 a. 說來說去
 b. 逛來逛去
 (14) X-Lai-Y-Qu:
 a. 衝來撞去

b. 翻來覆去

In the same spirits of previous works on constructional idioms, we endeavor to establish that the XSXKY expression also belongs to one of the three constructional idioms, or more exactly to a hybrid idiom like Kay and Fillmore's WXDY Construction.

3. Evidences for the Idiomaticity of XSXKY

In this section, we will provide some evidences for the idiomaticity of XSXKY by looking into its syntactic properties and semantic generalizations.

3.1 Syntactic Properties of XSXKY

First of all, “X SHI X, *keshi* Y” consists of two conjuncts conjoined by the connector *keshi* ‘but’ (or simply *ke*). Other connectors that can appear in this expression include *danshi* ‘but’, *buguo* ‘however’, *zhishi* ‘only’, *jiushi* ‘except’. (cf. Lü 1984: 438) All of them seem to fall within a broad semantic category and following Poizat-Xie (2002) we term them as adversative connectors.⁴ Of these adversative connectors, *keshi* is the most frequently used one in this particular expression⁵, and that is precisely why we adopt *keshi* as a cover term in “X SHI, *keshi* Y.”

Next, in this expression as well as anywhere else there is usually one optional subject or/and topic preceding the whole sentence, which we gloss as Z. The Z-element in (15), for instance, is *wo* ‘I’ and *xin* ‘letter’ for (15a) and (15b) respectively. Also optional is pre-SHI X. As shown in (16), little information is lost when the pre-SHI predicate is absent since post-SHI X keeps as much information as does pre-SHI X, though the “X SHI X” schema is not maintained any longer. What’s more, given enough situational context it is even possible to leave out both the Z-element and pre-SHI X, as in (17).⁶ Since sentences in (15~17) all convey a

⁴ In one of her notes, Poizat-Xie writes “We prefer the term *adversative* to those of *opposition*, *contrast*, *reversal*, *restriction*, terms often employed in the literature of Chinese linguistics, which are, in our view, different adversative forms.”(italics original, but the translation is ours)

⁵ Informally, based on Sinica Corpus there are 25 tokens of this expression among 2000 tokens of *keshi*, 12 tokens of this expression among 2000 tokens of *danshi*, 4 tokens of this expression among 1537 tokens of *zhishi*, no occurrence of this expression among 966 tokens of *jiushi*, and finally two tokens of this expression among 2000 tokens of *buguo*.

⁶ But this does not always work. Compare:

- (i) a. 他看書是看書，可是只看漫畫書。
? b. 是看書，可是只看漫畫書。

concessive reading, they can be viewed as variations of the same expression XSXKY. Accordingly, we propose a tentative schema for XSXKY in (18), where Z and pre-SHI is optional (indicated by the parenthesis).

- (15) a. 我喝酒是喝酒了，不過沒有再開車。
 b. 信寫是寫了，可是還沒寄出去。 Zhu (1997: 109)
- (16) a. 我是喝酒了，不過沒有再開車。
 b. 信是寫了，可是還沒寄出去。
- (17) a. 是喝酒了，不過沒有再開車。
 b. 是寫了，可是還沒寄出去。
- (18) A tentative schema for XSXKY :
 (Z) (X) SHI X, keshi Y

Furthermore, of the two conjuncts in XSXKY the first one appears to be syntactically more interesting since the second one can be any clause while the first one ought to include SHI, which is surrounded by two identical X-elements. The X-element can be instantiated as various syntactic constituents. Most frequently, X is a verbal predicate, and this would give rise to different variations of the first conjunct in case of an overt object. Chao (1991: 287) specified four variations and employed (19) to illustrate the syntactic schemata and their corresponding instances.⁷

- (19) a. VO SHI VO 吃飯是吃飯，可是不喝酒。
 b. VO SHI V 吃飯是吃，可是不喝酒。
 c. V SHI VO 吃是吃飯，可是不喝酒。
 d. O SHI V 飯是吃，可是酒不喝。

In addition to Chao's four alternatives, we find two more to be acceptable as well. If we regard the object *fan* 'rice' in (19d) as the Z-element, we can effortlessly derive (20a) according to (18). Also, we may obtain (20b) by deleting the pre-SHI X *chii-fan* 'have a meal (lit. eat rice)' in (19a) or *chii* 'eat' in (19c).

- (20) a. OV SHI V 飯吃是吃，可是酒不喝。
 b. SHI VO 是吃飯，可是酒不喝。

-
- (ii) a. 她運動是運動，可是都只有手在動。
 ? b. 是運動，可是都只有手在動。

The awkwardness of (ib) and (iib) might rise from the neutral aspect of the verbal predicate. In this case, the presence of the Z-element or a stress on SHI may compensate for the awkwardness.

⁷ Unlike Chao, Zhu (1997:109) did not mention "V SHI VO", but he instead identified "VO SHI O" to be unacceptable.

Aside from verbal predicates, the X-element can also be a nominal, adjectival, or locative predicate and even a whole clause, as illustrated respectively in (21~24).

- (21) 親戚是親戚，可是原則不能破壞。 (Lü1984:438)
 (22) 他瘦是瘦，可從來不生病。 (Lü1984:439)
 (23) 在家是在家，可是他不想見你。 (Zhu 1997:110)
 (24) 我負責是我負責，可你也脫不了身。 (Yue-Hashimoto 1993:28)

More often than not, post-SHI X is syntactically more complicated and thus semantically more restricted than pre-SHI X. A rule of thumb is that, as Lü (1984: 439) pointed out, the constituent heads in both Xs are the same under all circumstances. For example, apart from the identical elements across SHI there can be a complement (25a), an aspect marker (25b), a modifier (25c), a modal (25d), or even a negator (25e). A common feature of sentences in (25) is that the post-SHI constituent is a restriction, modification, alteration, or negation of the pre-SHI one. In other words, pre-SHI X is the basis on which post-SHI X “comments”. For this reason, in line with Zhu (1997)⁸ we suggest pre-SHI X be viewed as topic and post-SHI X as the comment with respect to pre-SHI X. In this view, it would be easy to explain why (26) is unacceptable even though pre-SHI X and post-SHI bear the same head. It is because in (26) post-SHI X can hardly be the comment of pre-SHI X. For instance, we would say “As for swiftness, it is not swift” (25e) rather than “As for non-swiftness, it is swift” (26e).

- (25) a. 吃是吃得不多，不過營養夠了。
 b. 我喝酒是喝酒了，不過沒有再開車。 (Zhu 1997:110)
 c. 便宜是挺便宜，只是顏色不好看。
 d. 去是想去，可是身上沒有錢。
 e. 快是不快，可是很安全。 (Sinica Corpus)
- (26) *a. 吃得不多是吃，不過營養夠了。
 *b. 我喝酒了是喝酒，不過沒有再開車。
 *c. 挺便宜是便宜，只是顏色不好看。
 *d. 想去是去，可是身上沒有錢。
 *e. 不快是快，可是很安全。

Last of all, before moving onto the semantic aspect in the next section, we suggest a revised version of the schema for XSXKY, taking into consideration the formal

⁸ Zhu (1997) proposes that SHI’s major function is to mark a topic and then introduce a comment in respect to that topic. That is, SHI is a separator of topic and comment.

properties mentioned above. As (27) shows, pre-SHI X is now revised into X_T and post SHI X into X_C to indicate that the former is the topic on which the latter comments.

(27) A tentative syntactic schema of XSXKY (revised):

(Z) (X_T) SHI X_C , keshi Y

3.2 Semantic Generalizations of XSXKY

After investigating the syntactic properties of XSXKY, we turn to inspect its semantic generalizations. To start with, the first conjunct in XSXKY may be syntactically independent since *keshi* is normally a coordinate conjunction, but it is semantically “subordinate” for sure since it cannot stand by itself.⁹ A sentence like (28) is short of a sense of closure. In other words, the “X SHI X, keshi Y” pattern constitutes not only a syntactic “unit” but also a semantic “unity”. In some cases, the “X SHI X” schema does dispense with adversative clauses, but that would also deprive the concessive reading of the schema. As can be seen, sentences like (29) express no concessive meaning but instead signal the speaker’s epistemic stance towards a proposition. This suggests it is the expression “X SHI X, keshi Y” as a whole that gives rise to the concessive meaning instead of the “X SHI X” schema alone.

(28) *他唸書很認真是很認真。

(29) a. 路上趕是趕不上了，算是辜負了老爺、太太的恩典，苦了大爺你了。¹⁰
b. 作業那麼多，我看今晚寫是寫不完了。

Next, to assure the concessive reading in this expression SHI ought to be a particle of affirmation instead of a grammaticalized copula.¹¹ Compare (30a) and (30b), where SHI functions as a mere particle of affirmation in the former but a copular verb in the latter. As a result, (30a) is an instance of XSXKY while (30b) is not, and that is also why (30a) allows for (30a') while (30b) does not for (30b'). What’s more, even the “SHI...DE” construction, where strong sense of affirmation is noticeable, carries no concessive reading and cannot be an instance of XSXKY, as contrasted in (30c). For this reason, we would like to refine the schema in (27) into (31), where “SHI

⁹ Similarly, the first conjunct in “One more X and Y” construction (Taylor 2003: 571) is semantically “conditional” and thus “subordinate” as well.

¹⁰ 兒女英雄傳第三回：三千里孝子走風塵，一封書義僕托幼主

¹¹ Yen (1986) argues from a diachronic perspective that SHI came to the language as a particle of affirmation. Cf. The modal particle *zwar* in the German construction “*zwar...aber*” (although...yet), whose etymological meaning “true” has now developed into its current actual function of concession (Rudolph 1996: 307)

[Part.]” indicates that SHI ought to be a particle of affirmation.

(30) a. 在美國讀書是很辛苦，但是不痛苦。

a'. 在美國讀書辛苦是很辛苦，但是不痛苦。

b. 登山是一種探險，但是不盲目的冒險。

*b'. 登山探險是一種探險，但是不盲目的冒險。

c. 人是孤單的，但是並不代表他和別人沒有相通的地方。

*c'. 人孤單是孤單的，但是並不代表他和別人沒有相通的地方。

(Sinica Corpus)

(31) A tentative schema for XSXKY (final):

(Z) (X_T) SHI [Part.] X_C, keshi Y

Furthermore, sentences in (32) are six variations of the same proposition.¹² By uttering any of (32), a speaker S is held responsible for claiming two propositions to be true, (33a) and (33b). In logical terms, (32) entails (33), that is, whenever (32) is true, so is (33). Suppose p is the proposition “We have a meal” and q “We drink wine”, all the variations in (32) can be logically represented as $p \cap \neg q$.

(32) a. 我們吃飯是吃飯，可是不喝酒。

b. 我們吃飯是吃，可是不喝酒。

c. 我們吃是吃飯，可是不喝酒。

d. 我們飯是吃，可是酒不喝。

e. 我們飯吃是吃，可是酒不喝。

f. 我們是吃飯，可是不喝酒。

(33) a. 我們吃飯

b. 我們不喝酒

However, by saying (32) S is intending much more than what (33) can capture. First, in most cases the proposition p has been mentioned or at least hinted at by some other interlocutor in the previous discourse, be it a statement or a question. (cf. the communicative aspect in the Incredulity Response Construction) Thus in terms of Tomlin and Pu’s (1991) model of discourse production, p lies within the “activated memory” (ActMem), waiting to receive “focal attention” or keeping serving as an embellishment of the focal attention. Now, S *acknowledges* the truth of the activated p by saying the first conjunct in (32).

Second, having been confirmed to be true, the activated p nevertheless does not

¹² The pragmatic motivation for choosing one variation over another is beyond the scope of our study.

receive focal attention, functioning instead as a lead-up of the following conjunct. What currently falls into the focal attention of S is the second conjunct, which may be a new piece of information to an interlocutor of S but which has definitely been projected at least when the first conjunct is being uttered. The first conjunct projects, or foreshadows¹³, the second conjunct since the former is semantically subordinate to the latter. In other words, S has been planning the content of the second conjunct which an interlocutor of S also anticipates as early as the first conjunct is being uttered. Since the second conjunct is the focal utterance, S *asserts* the truth of the early projected $\neg q$ merely by saying it.

Third, there always holds certain relationship between the activated p and the early projected $\neg q$. For example, by harshly saying (34) a wife is trying to confirm whether her husband is going to dine out with his friends again, and he responds to her question by saying (32). What makes the husband assert the second conjunct and the wife understand its relevance in this current discourse is their shared background knowledge that normally he drinks wine when he dines out with friends and that she is fretful about his drinking. The husband thus concedes the truth of his dining out and simultaneously removes anxiety from his wife by promising that he is not going to drink in spite of his dining out. That is to say, in addition to acknowledging p and asserting $\neg q$, the husband *invalidates* for this particular time the assumption that normally he drinks when he dines out.

(34) 你們又要出去吃飯?

Combining the features mentioned above, we recapitulate the semantic generalizations of “X SHI X, keshi Y” as follows: supposing p is the proposition for the first conjunct and q for the second, SHI is a particle of affirmation, and a speaker S utters XSXKY in the discourse D to a hearer H, then it follows that (a) S is held responsible for claiming $p \cap q$. (b) p lies within the activated memory of S since H has mentioned or at least hinted at p while or before D is taking place. (c) q falls into the focal attention of S since it is the main concern of S and has been projected at least as early as p is being uttered. (d) S concurrently acknowledges p , asserts q , and invalidates some kind of assumption implied by XSXKY.

4. The Relationship between X and Y

¹³ According to Auer (2002: 1), “By projection, I mean the fact that an individual action or part of it foreshadows another.”

The semantic generalizations mentioned above may be simplified as a concessive relation between the two variables in XSXKY, but this kind of simplification does not help to unveil how the speaker conceptualizes the concessivity in XSXKY. Thus, in this section we shall scrutinize the relationship between X and Y in light of mental spaces. (Fauconnier 1985, 1994; Verhagen 2000)

4.1 Concessivity and Mental Spaces

Concession has long been considered related to causation and thus described to express “incausality” by König (1991a), that is, the counteraction of a causal link.¹⁴ Specifically, when saying “although p , not q ” a speaker not only claims p and $\neg q$ to be true, but also presupposes that *normally* p would cause q to happen, as shown in (35). However, for some reason q does not happen in spite of p , so the speaker uses the concessive connector to convey the counteraction of the causal link holding between p and q .

(35) Although p , $\neg q$ means:

- a. Truth conditions: $p \wedge \neg q$
- b. Presupposition: *normally* $p \rightarrow q$

As an alternative to “incausality”, Verhagen (2000: 368) characterizes concession in terms of Fauconnier’s (1985, 1994) theory of Mental Spaces. By his example, the speaker of (36) must be working with some general rule, or “topos”¹⁵, that runs like “the harder one works, the more likely it will be for one to pass exams.”

(36) John did not pass his exams although he worked hard.

By uttering “although p , not q ” the speaker invites the hearer to establish two “similar but distinct” mental spaces, with one projected from the other. As diagrammed in Figure 1 (where lines are connectors that map counterparts across spaces), Space₁ is projected from Space₀, the speaker’s actual mental space, and the topos $t: \{P \rightarrow Q\}$ holds in Space₁ but fails to apply in Space₀. The topos may transfer “for free” from Space₁ to Space₀ (hence the parenthesis in Space₀), since the speaker does not

¹⁴ The causation in language is a broad concept, including cause, reason, point of departure, prerequisite, condition, fact of release, ect. (Rudolph 1996:27)

¹⁵ According to Verhagen (2000), topos is a general term for other related labels, such as *discourse presupposition*, *conventional implicature*, *defeasible implication*, ect. Capital letters in a topos by his convention indicate the propositions involved are generalizations, not particulars, which are represented by small letters instead.

necessarily hold the topos to be true at the time of speaking, though he/she is doubtlessly still aware of the idea conveyed by the topos.

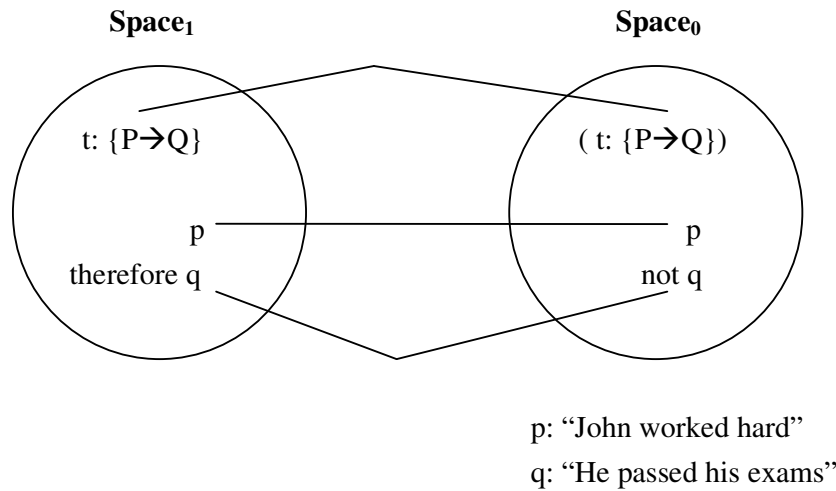


Figure 1. Elementary Mental Space configuration for concessivity
(Verhagen 2000: 367)

The separation of these two spaces makes it possible to distinguish the system of representation for causality and that for concessivity without mixing up the two. Though much interrelated, causality and concessivity differs in that the former does not necessarily involve the construction of more than one mental space (only one space is enough for causality) whilst the latter does (at least two spaces are needed for concessivity).¹⁶ (Verhagen 2000: 370)

In brief, Figure 1 presents a plain picture of how the speaker conceptualizes causality and concessivity respectively. It also accommodates König’s “incausality” by the juxtaposition of two mental spaces, where a causal link holds in one while breaks in the other. Most important of all, as we shall see in the next section Figure 1 remains a useful apparatus to account for the relationship between X and Y in XSXKY even when “incausality” fails to account for the concessivity in XSXKY.

4.2 Three Types of Concessive Relation between X and Y

In light of the mental space configuration for concessivity, it is suggested that the relationship between X and Y in “X *SHI* X, *keshi* Y” can be classified into three types,

¹⁶ According to Verhagen (2000), three spaces are required to account for “epistemic concessivity”, but we only consider “content concessivity” here.

one for the general dissonance between X and Y, another for the restriction of the pre-stated X by Y, and the other for the divergence between the respective consequence of X and Y. Their common feature is that there exists a contradiction across the two mental spaces for concessivity.

First of all, consider (37), where the first is more acceptable than the second. The reason is understandable since we are much more likely to keep the habit of watching TV whenever having a meal than that of having a meal whenever watching TV (which would be weird, if not impossible to do). Since the situation in (37a) is quite similar to that in Figure 1, (37a) can be graphically represented as Figure 2.¹⁷ There is an obvious dissonance between the first and the second conjunct against the topos of a “causal” link, in this case, the habit of some individual Sb who watches TV when it comes to dining time. The contradiction lies between the consequence *q* in Space₁ and the consequence *not q* in Space₀, indicated by the boldfaced line with arrows of opposite direction.

- (37) a. 吃飯是吃飯，可是不看電視。
 ?b. 看電視是看電視，可是不吃飯。

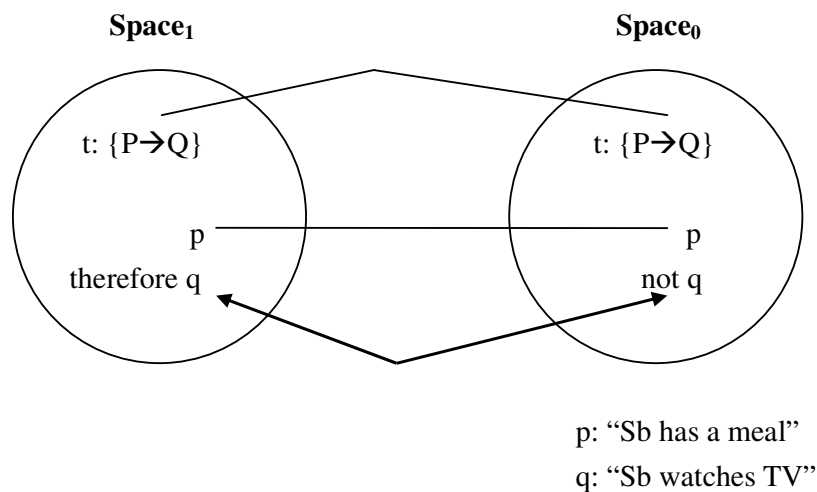


Figure 2. Mental space configuration for the dissonance between X and Y

In (38) are other examples of this type. All of them lead to a general dissonance between X and Y. Cars are for driving but often fails to be started for some reason (38a); one normally expects people at home to receive their guests, but the reception

¹⁷ P and Q are the propositions for the X and Y of XSXKY respectively.

validity of the pre-stated p exclusively to the reading of romance, thus giving rise to the result that “it is not the case that she reads all kinds of books.” (*not (all p)*). Unlike those in the first type, the toposes here in Space_1 and Space_0 are related but not identical (hence the dashed line), and p is the foundation on which q puts forward refinement that the speaker considers closer to his or her actual mental reality (hence p underneath q). As a consequence, to the speaker of (39) “She reads romance only” is truer, or more exact, than “She reads books” (39a), “My sister sings pop songs only” than “My sister sings” (39b), and “I play basketball only” than “I do exercise” (39c).

At last, the third type is sentences like (40), where “incausality” seems not to work.

- (40) a. 東西貴是貴，可是品質很可靠。
 b. 快是不快，可是很安全。 (Sinica Corpus)
 c. 便宜是挺便宜，只是顏色不好看。 (Lü1984: 439)

In (40a), for example, it would be odd to assume something that is expensive normally does not have good quality. Rather, cases are that the proposition in the first conjunct is a contra-argument against some consequence while that in the second a pro-argument supporting the same consequence that the first proposition rebuts (cf. Rudolph 1996: 307). For illustration, (40a) is represented as Figure 4, where R is the consequence that P rebuts but Q supports.

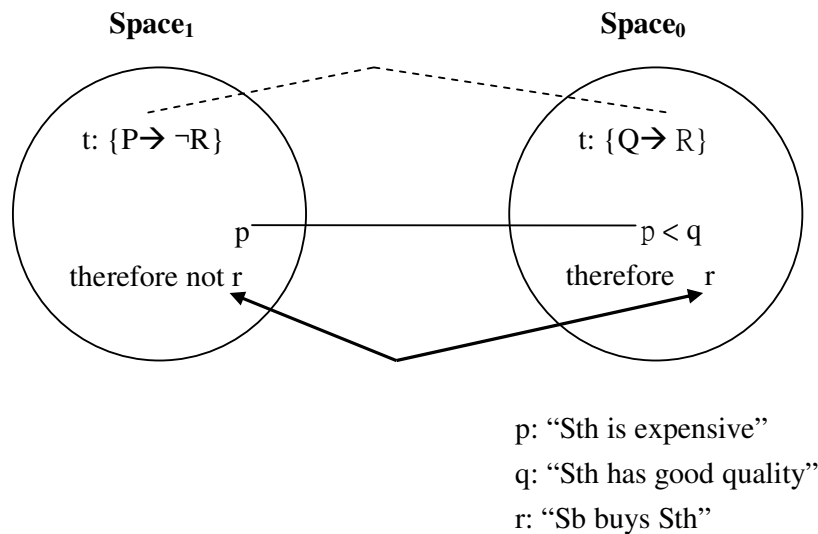


Figure 4. Mental space configuration for the divergence of the respective consequence of X and Y

In this case, something (Sth) that is expensive may discourage somebody (Sb) from buying it, but something that has good quality will normally encourage people to buy it. To the speaker of (40a), the consideration of quality outweighs that of price (hence $p < q$). Likewise, safety is considered more important than speed (40b) and color valued more than price (40c).

On the whole, the “X SHI X” schema in XSXKY can be seen as a space builder that sets up a “similar but distinct” space (Space₁), projected from the speaker’s actual mental space (Space₀) where lies the speaker’s real intention and focal attention. This projected space, lingering within the speaker’s activated memory, serves as a contrast to the speaker’s actual mental space. Most important of all, the concessive relation in XSXKY is better described as a cross-space contradiction than “incausality”, which may not be able to account for all the instances of XSXKY.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have intended to demonstrate XSXKY as a whole constitutes a constructional idiom, or a partially filled idiom to be precise, by investigating its syntactic properties and semantic generalizations, and we summarize the features in these two aspects into a final version of the schema for XSXKY in (31).

(31) A tentative schema for XSXKY (final):

(Z) (X_T) SHI [Part.] X_C, keshi Y

As for the concessive relation between X and Y which is not specified in (31), we suggest it to be classified into three types, one for the general dissonance between X and Y, another for the restriction of the pre-stated X by Y, and the other for the divergence between the respective consequence of X and Y. What’s more, in light of mental spaces the common feature of these three types is a cross-space contradiction, which better accounts for the instances of XSXKY than “incausality”.

Since concession is a rather interaction-oriented phenomenon, it is expected that some discourse-based and pragmatic research on XSXKY (e.g. the issue of politeness) can be conducted in the future. Furthermore, much work on the use of other concessive expressions in Mandarin is needed in order to figure out how concession is managed in the course of conversation and how the use of concession may be shaped by language/culture-specific factors, if there is any.

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