How Linguistic Notions Formed the Concession During the Grammaticalization Process? A Contrastive Study of the Mandarin Concessive Connector 即使 jishí and Its Equivalents in French

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Abstract
The article treats the most prototypical concessive connector 即使 jishí “although” “even if” in Chinese and its equivalents in French based on previous theories and analyses on the two languages. The aim of the present work is to explore the concessive mechanism in two languages that are typologically distant. By relating several crucial linguistic notions such as temporality, hypothesis and causative verbs, our research not only demonstrates the diachronic evolution of the concessive marker 即使 jishí, but also highlights its rapprochements with certain French concessive connectors (such as cependant, mémest, etc.) from logico-semantic and syntactico-discursive points of view. After consulting various corpora from archaic to contemporary Chinese and French, as well as using technical linguistic methodologies, the article presents surprising similarities in terms of the concessive formation despite the etymological and cultural differences of the two languages.

Keywords: Concessive connectors, Mandarin, French, hypothesis, temporality, causality

1. Introduction

1.1 Notion of concession in French and in Mandarin

The idea of concession dates to the rhetoric field and becomes more and more precise from medieval and classical eras in French (Soutet, 1990, p. 3–5). It was not until the course of the 19th century that the term concession enters the grammatical lexicon and was defined by the grammarians as a logical relation uniting two propositions. It is not a coincidence that the ancient rhetoricians and grammarians have always listed and studied this rhetorical figure. The concession, which has extremely rich, varied and nuanced means of expression, plays a specific and irreplaceable role in our discourse. It is defined as a two-step argument movement (Morel, 1996, 5): “The speaker begins by recognizing the validity of an argument that he lends to his opponent in the debate. Then he enunciates a counter-argument that comes to restrict the scope or destroy it.”

Mandarin Chinese is an isolating language with a reduced morphology belonging to the Sino-Tibetan languages. Since the dawn of the first systematic work on the Mandarin Chinese’s grammar Ma Shi Wen Tong (The grammar of Ma) in 1898, the conjunction, as one of the most important functional categories (also named “empty categories” by the author), was first introduced in an independent chapter. This establishes the importance of its role in the grammatical scope. One of its sub-classifications, concessive conjunctions, is the most problematic category. According to Chinese linguists, the concessive sentence belongs to the complex sentence field whose subordinate has a position opposite to that of the principal. In a concessive phrase, the enunciator provisionally “allows” or “admits” the assertion or hypothesis of the subordinate by using it as a concession in the discourse (J. Li, 1924). In fact, the said “concession” is thus a temporary admission (S. Lü, 1956). This is the reason why some Chinese linguists also called concessive conjunctions “permissive” conjunctions.

However, the concessive link is not restricted to a simple logical relation but is a complex operation. On a logico-causal level, the concession is a cause that should have acted but did not act. The concessive mechanism combines many already complex linguistic notions that are often studied separately by linguists: temporality, intensity, negation, causality, subjectivity, etc. All together, they constitute the concessive operation.
Therefore, it is often said that the concession is a “secondary” or “composed” linguistic concept, and it is almost impossible to find a simple or archaic word expressing the concession in many languages.

1.2 Theoretical research on concession in France and in China

In France, thematic work on concessive connectors was mainly conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, represented by two important theses of M.-A. Morel and O. Soutet, published respectively in 1980 and 1990. These two authors, from lexico-syntactic and diachronic-semantic points of view, study the definitions and explanations of concession given by grammarians up to the 20th century, as well as the origins of concessive expressions in the 16th century and their grammaticalization process during history. R. Martin (1987) devoted a chapter to the study of the worlds involved in a concessive relation from the angle of formal semantics. He proposes the "underlying implication" (R. Martin, 1987), a logical mechanism of primacy in the concessive relation: something is expected to arise from an existing situation. H. Gettrup and H. Nølke (1984) are particularly interested in concessive adverbial morphemes in French. Also inspired by “the Geneva School”, P. Blumenthal (1980) and O. Ducrot (1984) deal with several relevant linguistic notions such as adversity and the act of speech in their work. J.-C. Anscombre (1985, 2001) explains in his articles the relations between the concession and the causality, the negation, the condition from logical and argumentative points of view. S. Mellet (2008) dedicates a work that deals, over a wide range of corpora, with concessive connectors in French through the centuries from syntactic and argumentative angles.

In China, researchers have considerably been deepening the properties, constraints, and subdivisions of concessive conjunctions since the embryonic stage of the modern Chinese grammar system. J. Li (1924), one of the founders of Chinese grammar, distinguishes two types of concessional conjunctions. For the first one, represented by 虽然 suīrán “despite”, and its various derivatives (such as 虽是 suīshì and 虽说 suīshuō, whose first morpheme means “despite” and the second morphemes mean respectively “to be” and “to say”), it is a question of introducing an assertion from a certain fact. For the second, represented by 即使 jíshì, 就是 jiùshì, 纵然 zòngrán and its derivatives, as well as 哪怕 nàpà, they all mean “although” or “even if” according to the linguistic context. In contrast to “allowing” a certain assertion, this second type of concessive conjunctions is often used as a basis for psychological “presupposition”. L. Wang (1944), who has a very similar point of view, considers that 虽然 suīrán “despite” and its derivatives belong to the concessive conjunctions of “real permission”, while the other expressions mentioned above are concessive markers of “hypothetical permission”. According to S. Lü (1956), the clause introduced by 虽然 suīrán “despite”, as well as that introduced by 即使 jíshì “although” or “even if”, are all concessive clauses. For the author, there is a logic in relation to the concessive subordinate: in a sentence in the form of “[Concessive connector] + q, p” either “the cause of q does not produce the consequence of p” or “the consequence of p nevertheless occurs despite the defect of the cause of q”. He listed for the first time another kind of concessive proposition in the form of a concessive conjunction: 即使 jíshì “although” or “even if” whose first morpheme means “immediately”, and the second means “to be”, directly followed by a noun instead of a subordinate with the complete SVO. Since the year 2000, the work on the subject concerns in principle two branches: the uses of concessive conjunctions in the complex sentence from the logico-syntactic point of view, and the grammaticalization of the concessive markers. Important research on the two approaches above include the book by H. Li (2013) on the concession and the relevant issues, and the research by C. Chi and Y. Ling (2008), Z. Li (2017), and K. Wu (2006) on the grammaticalization of certain concessive markers.

Based on previous research and combining theoretical currents on both sides in French and Chinese, we will try to analyze the most typical and frequently used concessive marker in contemporary Chinese: 即使 jíshì “although” “even if” “if”. We will also try, from a logico-semantic and syntactico-discursive point of view, to highlight their links with French, an Indo-European inflectional language, during the process of grammaticalization of these concessive conjunctions. We will surprisingly notice how these two languages “thicken” their concessive mechanism in a very similar way through the grammaticalization process despite their enormous linguistic and cultural divergences.

2. Concessive marker 即使 jíshì “although” “even if” and its brief grammaticalization history
即使**jíshí**“although” “even if”, which can be interpreted as the hypothesis connector “if” in some cases as well, is one of the most typical concessive conjunctions in contemporary Chinese. It is often at the top of the clause, followed by a postponed main clause that semantically opposes the logic of the previous one.

Like most concessive markers, 即使**jíshí** is a “composed” or “secondary” connector, and was a syntactic construction combining two morphemes 即**jí** and 使**shǐ** in history. 即**jí** is a polyseme that can act as five different parts of speech: noun, verb, adverb, preposition and conjunction. When it plays the conjunction role, it has either the concessive meaning “although” “even if” (example 1) or the hypothetical meaning “if” (example 2). When used as an adverb, it indicates the temporality of two events that happen very quickly or nearly simultaneously, “at the same time” so to speak (example 3). For instance:

(1) 公子 即 **合** 符, 而 晋鄙 不 授

王子 即**jí** 合**hé** 符, 而 晋鄙 不 授

**gōngzǐ** 即 合 符, 而 晋鄙 不 授

王子 即合符, 而 晋鄙 不授

**gōngzǐ** 即**jí** 合**hé** 符, 而 晋鄙 不 授

公子 即**jí** 合符, 而 晋鄙 不授

公子 即合符, 而 晋鄙 不授

 prince is given the command *jí* and *fú* but Emperor JIN Neg bestow

 prince military power on the contrary again request instructions Emperor WEI thing

必 危 矣。

**bì** 危 **yí**

必须 危险矣。

must dangerous **yí**

(2) 即 不 幸 有 方 二 三 千里

即 不 幸 有 方 二 三 千里

**jí** 不 幸 有 方 二 三 千里

如果 不 幸 有 方 二 三 千里

if Neg fortunate there is vertically and horizontally Num-two Num-three miles

之 旱, 国 胡 以 相 恤。

**zhī** 旱 国 胡 以 相 恤。

Gen drought state what use treat aid

(3) 秦昭 王 后悔 出 孟尝 君, 求 之 已

QINZHAO emperor regret liberate MENGCHANGG AplMk call PronP3Sg already

去, 即 使 人 驰 传 逐 之。

去, 即 使 人 驰 传 逐 之。

leave immediately let do PronP3 ride horses release the order chase PronP3Sg

(4) 节 用 而 思 人, 使 民 以 时。

节 用 而 思 人, 使 民 以 时。

节 用 而 思 人, 使 民 以 时。

**jié** 用 而 思 人, 使 民 以 时。

save use and take care of people get working people according to agricultural seasons

(5) 向 使 三 国 各 爱 其 地， 齐
xiàng shǐ sān guó gè ài qí dì
if if Num-three states respectively love Gen national territory State Qi
人 勿 附 于 秦。
rén wù fù yú qín
people Neg depend on toward State Qin

(Gushiwen.org, 2011)

“If the people of the three states love their own territories, the people of State Qi do not depend on State Qin.”

即使 jīshí appeared in historical documents for the first time during the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD). At this time, 即使 jīshí was a syntactic construction of two morphemes of different natures: the adverb 即 jí “immediately” + the causative verb 使 shǐ “to let (someone) do (something)” “to get/have (something) done” (C. Chi and Y. Ling 2008, 92). For example:

(6) 如 此 则 民 怨， 诸 侯 惧， 即 使 辩 武
rú cǐ zé mín yuàn zhūhóu jù jí shǐ biàn wǔ
like DemPron thus people resentment vassals afraid if let do sophists
隨 而 说 之， 倚 可 徵 幸 什 得
suí ér shuò zhī táng kě jiàoxìng shǐ dé
follow CoorConj persuade Pron maybe can by chance Num-ten obtain
一 乎?
yī huú
Num-one TonPtcl

(Guoxue.com, 2000)²

“If you (the emperor) do this, people will be resentful, and vassals will be afraid. If you order sophists to persuade the people and the vassals, you may have one chance out of ten to win their support.”

During the Six Dynasties (220 AD–589 AD), the syntactic construction 即使 jīshí began to change. We find the combination of the hypothetical conjunction 即 jí “if” + the causative verb 使 shǐ “to let (someone) do (something)” “to get/have (something) done”. For instance:

(7) 丁 椽， 好 士 也， 即 使 二 两 目
dìngyuán hǎo shì yě jí shǐ qǐ liǎng mù
DINGYUAN good man TonPtcl if let be AdjPoss Num-two eyes
盲 尚 当 与 女。
máng shàng dāng yǔ nǚ
blind still should marry daughter

(Guoxue.com, 2000)³

“Dingyuan is such a nice person. If he goes blind, he is still worth marrying my daughter.”

We share the same opinion with C. Chi and Y. Ling (2008, 93) here: if we compare example (7) with example (6), we will observe that what follows 使 shǐ in example (6) is a concrete action: allowing/ordering eloquent persons to persuade people and vassals. However, “becoming blind” in example (7) is a hypothetical state. Since this period of the Six Dynasties (220 AD–589 AD), 使 shǐ has been expressing “to make someone be in a state” instead of “to have an action done by someone”. Its semantic meaning becomes more and more abstract and indefinite. 即使 jīshí has intermediate characters between the syntactic form 即 jí+ 使 shǐ and the hypothetical conjunction 即使 jīshí.

It is approved by the linguists that the syntactic construction “temporal adverb/hypothetical conjunction 即 jí+ the causative verb 使 shǐ” began to grammaticalize towards a concessive conjunction during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). For example:

We can observe from this example that 使 shì plays no longer the role of causative verb: its meaning of “to let (someone) do (something)” disappears. Moreover, semantically, the subjectivity of 即使 jíshǐ is reinforced: “she did this a little stubbornly” is no longer an objective result of “to do” but a subjective feeling of the enunciator. In modern Chinese, 即使 jíshǐ having finished its grammaticalization process has become a concessive conjunction. 即使 jíshǐ often connects two clauses in the form of “即使 jíshǐ q, p”. According to S. Lü (1956, p. 440–442), clause q actualizes the concessive hypothesis. On the other hand, F. Xing thinks that the proposition q introduced by 即使 jíshǐ can represent either a hypothesis or an actualized fact (2001, 440). M. Huang declares, with a more modest opinion, that 即使 jíshǐ has two values: “a value of logical concession: the fact introduced in the concession is given as discounted, and a value of concession and hypothesis: the fact introduced in the concession is given as fictitious.” (2005, 192). Therefore, depending on the context, the concessive connector 即使 jíshǐ can be translated either by “although” often introducing an actualized fact, or by “even if” introducing a hypothesis. No grammatical element decides the interpretation will go towards “although” or “even if”. For instance:

(8) 即使 有 些 勉强, 也 还 好 慢慢

jíshǐ yǒu xiē miǎnqiǎng yě hái hǎo màn màn
even though have a little grudgingly also still fine gradually
央求，何 至 下手 杀 了 他？
yángqiú hé zhì xiàshǒu shā le tā
beg how arrive effectuate kill PtcIAccplAsp P3Sg

(Blogapp.sina.cn, 2003)\(^4\)

“Even though (she) did this a little stubbornly, I could always beg her to do so. How come that I killed her?”

(9) 即使 他 很 富 有，他 也 买 不 到 幸 福

jíshǐ tā hěn fùyǒu tā yě mǎi búdào xìngfú
even though/even if P3Sg very rich P3Sg anyway buy Neg happiness
与 健康。
yǔ jiǎnkāng
and health

“He cannot buy happiness and health although he is/even if he is rich.”

(10) 我们 还 没 有 收 到 消 息， 即使 收 到 了， 应 该

wǒmen hái méiyǒu shōudào xiàoxì jíshǐ shōudào le yīnggāi
P3Pl yet Neg receive news even though receive PtcIAccplAsp should
也 不 会 是 好 消 息。
yě bù huí shì hǎo xiàoxì
neither Neg Cop good news

“We have not received any news yet (of the war). Even if we have some, I think it will not be good news.”

3. Concession: a combination of temporality, causality and hypothesis

3.1 Concession and temporality

Just as mentioned above, 即 jí is a polyseme, which is not only a hypothetical (concessive) conjunction, but also an adverb of time, which means “immediately”. In comparison to French, we can observe here how the language uses temporal construction to serve the concession. This phenomenon is found in the French adverb cependant, which means etymologically pendant ce temps “during this time” “during that”. The demonstrative adjective insists on the temporal simultaneity of two situations. There is still in contemporary French a slightly literary conjunctive phrase cependant que, which is purely temporal (example 11). For example:

(11) Cependant que j’ attendais l’ autobus, j’ ai lu mon journal.

during the time P1Sg wait for the bus P1Sg Aux read Gen newspaper

“While waiting for the bus, I read my newspaper.”

The phrase cependant que does not become concessive in contemporary French. Yet, on the other hand, the adverb cependant on the other hand has no longer the temporal value. It became an adversarial circumstantial

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morpheme then slipped into the concession. Thus, we can observe an interesting discordance between the adverb of time and the conjunctive phrase here. According to the studies of S. Mellet (2008, 203), the anaphoric morpheme ce (“this”) “favors the emergence of a logical relation”, and cependant found its use of opposition in the 16th century for the first time. Its a main adverb in French presenting the contrast and the concession. It is thus interpreted by “however” “nevertheless” (example 12) or “all the same” “though” (example 13):

   “The two cats are brothers. However, they have very different characters.”
13) Le restaurant n’est pas cher. Le dîner, cependant, est délicieux.
   “The restaurant is not expensive. The dinner, though, is delicious.”

Furthermore, we can also find how the temporal 即 ji “immediately” is easily combined with the hypothetical causality marker 使 shì “to let (someone) do (something)” during the grammaticalization process. In French, this analogous phenomenon is represented by alors, which is originally a temporal adverb meaning “then”, and that is gradually used as the consequence conjunction “so”. For instance, in the following example, we employ the temporal adverb alors to indicate the relation cause-consequence instead of a hypothetical complex sentence:

14) Il pleut, alors je prends mon parapluie.
   “It’s raining, so I take my umbrella.”
15) Si il va pleuvoir, je prendrai mon parapluie.
   “If it’s going to rain, I’ll take my umbrella.”

3.2 Concession and causality

Through the concessive connector 即使 jìshì, we observe that the concession is often associated with the causality idea “to let (someone) do (something)”. According to O. Soutet (1990) and M.-A. Morel (1983), the concession is at first a rhetorical figure. This leads us to think, from a rhetorical point of view, that the speaker abandons an argument to his opponent by “letting” his opponent express himself. We often see the concessive structure in French certes, j’accepte..., mais... “admittedly, I accept..., but...”. It is in fact a mechanism of admitting temporarily but to reverse afterward. It could be the reason why causative verbs like 使 shì are at the heart of the grammaticalization process of concessive connectors.

There is an obvious causal connection in the concession: the concession is a form of causality, which is normally verified but is not verified. When we say the following sentence:

16) Bien qu’il fasse beau, j’ai pris mon imperméable.
   “Although the weather was nice, I took my raincoat.”

There is a link between the “good weather” and the fact of “having a raincoat”. The expected causality order does not work: what is expected is when the weather is nice people normally do not need to take a raincoat. There is thus an established link between the weather and the type of clothing I wear. Here, the actualized hypothesis (qu’il fasse beau “the weather was nice”) and the concession (j’ai pris mon imperméable “I took my raincoat”) establish together the “abnormal” causality mechanism: with the actualized hypothesis, we are in the possible cause-consequence order that could have been effective; with the concession, we are in the situation where the cause is denied by the fact.

3.3 Concession and hypothesis

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, 即使 jìshì represents a concession value “although” “even if” or a hypothesis one “if” in contemporary Chinese. When used as a concessive conjunction, the fact introduced by 即使 jìshì is given as either assertive either fictitious.

In contemporary French, the hypothetical concessive marker is primarily represented by même si “even if” followed by the indicative mode. However, si “if” is not always hypothetical in French. It also has a contrastive value introducing an actualized fact. For example:
(17) Si Peter est courageux, Paul, lui, est singulièrement paresseux.
so PETER Cop brave PAUL P3Sg Cop particularly lazy

“Peter is so brave. As for Paul, he is particularly lazy.”

This statement insists on the contrast between the braveness of Peter and the laziness of Paul. The link here is not from cause to consequence, but a contrastive one. This usage of si has an influence on the interpretation of même si “even if”: besides the concessive connector même si integrating a hypothetical si, there is another one integrating a contrastive si introducing an actualized fact that is almost equivalent to bien que “although” “even though”. For example:

(18) Même si j’ étais riche, je n’ achèterais pas une Ferrari.
even if P1Sg Cop rich P1Sg Neg buy Neg a FERRARI

“Even if I were rich, I would not buy a Ferrari.”

(19) Même s’il est malade, il vient au cours.
although P3Sg Cop sick P3Sg comes to the class

“Although he is sick, he comes to class.”

Example (18) is typically a hypothetical concessive: the hypothesis presents a cause-consequence link: if I were rich, I would buy a Ferrari. On the other hand, the example (19) can be interpreted differently: even if it is true that he is sick, he nevertheless comes to the class. This is a si “if” we can interpret as “if it is true that”. Here, we leave the field of hypothesis to enter the factuality. More examples can be found in historical accounts in which même si “even though” is applied to introduce existing events. For example:

(20) En 1918, même si la France a gagné la guerre, elle n’ en est
     in 1918 although the France Aux win the war P3Sg Neg Pron Cop
     pas moins affaiblie.
     Neg minus weakened

“In 1918, even though it won the war, France was nonetheless weakened.”

No one disputes the statement above because it is an historical fact thus an assertion.

4. Conclusion

In this present paper, we presented our contrastive analyses of the most prototypical concessive marker in contemporary Chinese 即使 jishi “although” “even if” as well as its equivalents in French. From logico-semantic and syntactico-discursive points of view, we have not only presented briefly how the concessive marker 即使 jishi was formed in a diachronic way, but also highlighted its similarities with French as far as the grammaticalization process is concerned. 即使 jishi, which became a concessive conjunction during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), was initially a syntactic construction of two morphemes of different natures: the temporal adverb/hypothetical (concessive) conjunction 即 jì + the causative verb/hypothetical conjunction 使 shí. The study of 即使 jishi leads us to analyze how the grammar, no matter the studied languages typologically distant, uses temporality, causality and hypothesis in the composition of concession. To conclude, the concession is a complex logical relationship nourished by an aggregation of simple signs. That may be the reason why, even though many researchers studied the concession in recent years in both Chinese and French, it is constantly attracting the attention of new researchers willing to continue deepening this subject.
Abbreviation Table

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