

Analysis of Idiom Variation in the Framework of Linguistic Subjectivity

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Abstract

Idiom variation is a ubiquitous linguistic phenomenon which has raised a lot of research questions. The past approach was either formal or functional. Both of them did not pay much attention to cognitive factors of language users. By putting idiom variation in the framework of linguistic subjectivity, we have offered a new perspective in the studying idiom variation by giving due consideration to the cognitive factors underlying the use of idiom. As a grammatical unit with idiosyncratic features, idiom is pervasive in language and it performs special function. Variation of idiom performs pragmatic functions by conveying extra meaning. There are underlying cognitive motivation for idiom variation. By putting idiom in the theoretic framework of linguistic subjectivity, we can say that idiom variation can be regarded as the results of people's subjective choice to achieve the expression of people's stance and affect.

Keywords: Idiom variation, Linguistic subjectivity, Perspective, Affect, Modality

Introduction

Idioms constitute one important part of the language and culture. Knowing a language includes knowing idioms in that language. Different from ordinary phrases, idioms tend to be frozen in form and meaning and don't allow change in structure and meaning. However, variation is one important aspect to idiom. The words of some idioms can be moved or substituted by other words. The syntactic structure of idioms can be altered. Some idioms function as normal sequence of grammatical words. They have changes in tense and aspect. All these changes contribute to the creation of idiom variation. Speakers create new idiom out of the original ones by modifying the original idiom to convey extra meanings. Idiom variations are the results of people's creative use of language, expressing people's subjectivity.

1. Subjectivity

1.1 Subjectivity from Philosophical Perspective

The term "subjectivity" has been the focus of philosophical study for thousands of years. In their modern usage, subjectivity generally relates to a perceiving subject (normally a person) and objectivity perceived or unperceived object. Philosophers are interested in the following epistemological issues: a. Can we know objective reality? There exists discrepancy between subjective judgment and objective reality. Two people could step outside, one describing the weather as chilly, the other describing it as pleasant. How can we know the objective reality? b. Does agreement among subjects indicate objective knowledge? Objective judgments can be reached by using same measurement. By using measurements, judgments at least have a high probability of expressing truth regarding objective reality. An objective judgment regarding the weather can be reached by using thermometers. This seems to be indicative of the existence of objectivity. But there may be another person stating the weather is not as cold as most people thought. There still exists skepticism regarding knowledge of objective reality c. Is there no escape from the subjective? Since every method of knowledge, judgment, or even thought seems quite clearly to go on within the realm of subjective impressions, one cannot get out of one's subjective impressions. The knowledge of the objective world is hampered by our essential confinement within subjective impressions.

The issue of subjectivity has been dealt with in different areas. The study of subjectivity has been a major concern in the area of literature. Subjectivity in literature and art generally refers to expression of subjective feelings and emotions of individuals. Subjectivity creates a relationship between the artist and his message. Language is the vehicle of expression in which the flow of thought and the feelings can be communicated. Communication of speaker's subjective feeling is most clearly manifested in language which contains emotional language, such as

expressing feelings like anger, joy, despair etc. Writers tend to bring in their opinions, world view and knowledge into their interpretation of what is actually happening in the story. Many authors use artistic means such as the narrative voice and the subject position to manipulate their readers. Their voice and power is represented in their texts. The discussion of literature can not be purely objective. At the same time, the interpretation of literary works by different readers is different. Meaning is not present in the text and it is not consistent for all the readers. The constructivists tried to create works that would make the viewer an active viewer of the artwork. They believe that meaning is constructed by the reader. Because of their different social background, prior experiences and expectations, the same text may be interpreted differently by different readers. Reader's subjective feelings play important roles in text acceptance and interpretation.

1.2 Subjectivity from Linguistic Perspective

In the frame of linguistics, linguists believe that subjectivity is inherent in all kinds of language usage. This inbuilt feature of language is encoded in the language system. All the language in the world expresses subjectivity. Linguistic elements, structures, or usages are subjective. Subjectivity in language is related to the speaker. In the communication process, the speaking agent's voice and self is also reflected in his language. Linguistic signs are provided with an inherent subjectivity potential. In the western linguistic circle, Traugott (1992) and Langacker (1991) are two representative scholars in the study of linguistic subjectivity. Traugott's diachronic concept of grammaticalization highlights the role of subjectivity in the semantic and grammatical development. Langacker's synchronic concept of subjectivity is primarily based on his notion of "construal".

In Philosophy, according to Frege (2003), in the study of logic and philosophy we should "always separate sharply the psychological from the logical, the subjective from the objective". There is strict distinction between expression of ideas and accompanying psychological factors in language. The meaning of sentences is non-personal things and it has objective and abstract nature. In other words, it is public, objective so that people have been able to use language to communicate, because the language is the host of ideas for everyone there. Obviously, objectivity of language makes language public and shared. However, objectivity is founded on the individual's perception or understanding of language. It is subject to the individuals' subjective consciousness or awareness, so language is not objective. Once objectivity enters into the realm of human perception and understanding, it is no longer objective. On the contrary, with people's subjective perception and cognition, objective entity becomes subjective. If idea, thought has nothing to do with the human self-consciousness, it will not become the content of everyday communication.

From the perspective of phenomenology, people get to know and interact with the world by being-in-the-world. It is people's involvement in the world that creates meaning and value. In other words, the outside world is not an independent existence. They are always relative to people's interaction of the world and through human intervention they exist. Therefore, people or human being is a special existence who makes all the existence have meaning. How people exist and get involved in the world from a certain perspective influence the outcome of meaning. Therefore, by relying on language, people dwell in language. Subjectivity and objectivity coexist with each other and they are not independent of each other.

What we want to show here is what the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in language is. From the philosophical perspective, we believe that the linguistic subjectivity and objectivity should be a matter of degree. In fact, when the speaker says something, the speaker's perspective, feelings and judgment can not be completely divorced from the speaker's words, these personal judgments must be reflected in varying degrees in the speaker's discourse. From this sense, discourse is not objective. However, people use words to communicate so language must be objective and shared by every one.

It is generally believed that Benveniste (1971) is the first person to view "subjectivity" from the language point of view. Benveniste (1971) regards the "subjectivity" as a capability of the speaker. He pointed out that people construct their ego in and through language. Obviously, Benveniste's view of subjectivity is broadly consistent with the philosophy of humanism of continental Europe. Language is the home to existence and people exist in the language. People understand the world through language and boundaries of language constitutes the boundaries of the world.

After Benveniste, Lyons (1982) further elaborated "subjectivity" from the language point of view. His views are as follows: "When the speaker says the words, he also comments on his message, and his attitude towards the said content is also represented. The subjective concept is extremely important. What is of concern to the linguist is, more specifically, locutionary subjectivity: the subjectivity of utterance. Locutionary subjectivity is the locutionary agent's (the speaker's or writer's, the utterer's) expression of himself or herself in the act of utterance: locutionary subjectivity is, quite simply, self-expression in the use of language."

Currently, in linguistic circle, Lyons's concept of subjectivity is commonly used by scholars. Linguistic subjectivity is also the main concern of Lyons, that is, speaker's or writer's self-expression (including the views, positions, attitudes, beliefs, etc.) through discourse.

From the linguistic perspective, subjectivity refers to the subject and his or her perspective, feelings, beliefs, and desires. In philosophy, the term is usually contrasted with objectivity. In everyday verbal communication, a considerable portion of our language is used to make judgments and evaluations or to show empathy. For instance, by saying "The flower is beautiful" the speaker intends to show his/her appreciation and feelings. Language here helps to demonstrate his/her stance.

In fact, in the past, subjectivity has received attention mostly in literary work in western languages. The study of subjectivity is limited to literary contexts. However, in all the languages, subjectivity is a common phenomenon. Benveniste (1971) has said, "A language without the expression of person cannot be imagined".

Maynard (1993) said: "Verbal expressions used in everyday verbal interaction are known to simultaneously convey at least two integrated but distinguishable types of information." First, we describe the objects and events of the world in a propositional construction, and second, through the manner of presenting the proposition, we personalize the discourse as we express and reveal ourselves.

The majority of linguists in the past have adopted or are influenced by formal semantics which does not give due consideration to the phenomenon of subjectivity. The mainstream British and American philosophy are influenced by empiricism which is objective in nature. This fact is coupled by Chomsky's rationalism which does not include semantic study in his research. Subjective facets are totally ignored. The renewal of interest in subjectivity helps to remedy the situation. Linguists are made aware of the existence of locutionary subjectivity in discourse. It is the speaker's or writer's, the utterer's expression of himself or herself in the act of utterance. It is self-expression in the use of language.

In recent years, the increasing attention gained by linguistic subjectivity is due to the revival of "humanism" in linguistics. The rise of people's interest in functional linguistics, pragmatics and cognitive science challenged the basic tenets of structural linguistics and transformational grammar. All these new schools have stressed the fact that language is not just an objective expression of propositional thinking, but also the main channel to express speaker's views, feelings and attitudes. Language involves speaker's personal judgment and attitude towards the narrated event. Being the product of an individual human mind, any utterance bears some elements of subjectivity. Subjectivity is embodied in a language, including its syntax, vocabulary, phonetics, tone and body language. In language, it is mostly manifested in modal verbs and adverbs like must, may, etc. As one of frequently-occurred linguistic phenomena, idiom variation is used to express speaker's subjective feeling.

2. Studies on Idioms Variation

According to *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1992), Idiom is an expression, word, or phrase that has a figurative meaning that is comprehended in regard to a common use of that expression that is separate from the literal meaning or definition of the words of which it is made. It is speech form or an expression of a given language that cannot be understood from the individual meanings of its elements. The term idiom covers a broad area. It generally refers to those fixed phrasal forms whose meaning cannot be predicted by the meaning of its components. As carrier of culture, idioms constitute an indispensable part of language. Located in the forefront of language system, it is the result of language's self readjustment to meet the new expressive needs. Different from the other linguistic construction, idioms are characterized by integrity of meaning and form. The collocation of words in an idiomatic expression as an entity develops a specialized meaning. The structure of idiom is not productive and generative as other linguistic construction. For this unique linguistic phenomenon, past linguistic theories have different interpretations. Noncompositional view of idiom holds that the forms of idioms are fixed. The meaning of an idiomatic expression is not determined by the meanings of its constituent expressions and the rules used to combine them. Thus it is unpredictable. Idioms should be treated as long words which can not be separated and further analyzed. However, there are quite a lot of counterexamples. Some idioms are fixed like "how are you?" There are a large number of idioms which can be modified in various ways. They show certain degree of flexibility in sound, sense, structure. Phonetic flexibility, syntactic flexibility and lexical substitutability enable us to use idioms in a creative way. People will vary the original idiom according to expressive needs and create idiom variation. Decompositional view on idiom holds that meaning of each constituent of an idiom contributes to the overall meaning of the idiom, so meaning of idiom is predictable. Psychological experiments show that knowing the literal meaning of constituents of idiom will accelerate people's comprehension of idiom. We can study idiom by focusing on its constituent parts. Problems with this view are we cannot do constituent analysis to all the idioms. For

idioms whose meanings are opaque, we can not tell or predict their meanings by knowing the meaning of their parts. For idioms whose structure is not grammatical in the strict sense, it is hard to do the analysis.

In the idiom “We have take/have/enjoy forty winks”, “Take forty winks, have forty winks and enjoy forty winks” constitute three variations of the same idioms. In certain context, the idiom “Like father, like son” can have the variation “Like mother, like girl”. Lexical substitution and syntactic rearrangement are motivated by pragmatic needs as well as cognitive needs of the speaker. In the following three sentences: A. The FBI kept tabs on radicals. B. Tabs were kept on radicals by the FBI. C. Radicals were kept tabs on by the FBI. The idiomatic sense is not affected although the syntactic structures have been altered. Based on the examples above, it is very easy to draw the conclusion that although idioms are highly restricted in terms of lexicon, syntax and meaning, they also allow variations. The study of variations of English idioms has raised lots of scholars’ attention, and many of them researched on it from different theoretic perspectives. According to the previous research, we can know that the researchers have already done very profound study on the idioms variations.

According to systemic functional linguistics, languages evolves as systems of “meaning potential” (Halliday, 1994) or as sets of resources which influence what the speaker can do with language, in a particular social context. As a meaning potential, language allows speakers to constantly make choices from a set of options. Speaker’s intention plays important roles in the construal of meanings of different kinds. They select certain semantic or structural item from the resources and expresses ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. The selection of linguistic item is based primarily on communicative needs and is largely subjective to the speaker. Thus, it is very clear that in the case of idiomatic use, speakers will change some element in the original idiom to meet his expressive purpose. Variation of idiom is motivated mostly by speaker’s subjectivity. In the framework of functional linguistics, changes of syntactic or semantic element in idioms are conducive to the expression of people’s experiences, people’s emotions and people’s interaction with others.

Language users may alter their language with the aim of conveying extra meanings. In this way, many new idiom variations are formed. Generally speaking, variants of idiom are formed by replacing some of the original words or changing the original meaning or structure. Some idiom variations have been widely recognized and became conventionalized. They are known as legitimate idiom variation. This kind of idioms tends to be fixed and relatively simple. For example, “he who laughs last laughs best” can be reworded into “he who laughs last laughs longest”. “It is the last straw that breaks the camel’s back” can be simplified by cutting the latter part and give rise to a new idiom “The last straw”. These idiom variations are accepted and commonly used by people. They are called legitimate idiom variations.

In addition to legal changes in idiom variation, there is another kind of variation which is temporary and has not been widely accepted and used. People create temporary idiom variant to meet the needs of rhetoric and to increase emotional effect of expression according to context of use. Compared to legitimate variant, temporary variations are more flexible and complex. Usually they are not constrained by form and meaning of original idiom. Writers and speakers often make use of some of the parts of the original idioms, or change its semantic content and give it a new meaning for their expressive purpose.

For example, in the following sentence, “Sometimes tomorrow I will dress to the teeth, get in touch with you and tell you how grateful I really am.”(E.S. Gardener. **The Case of the Negligent Nymph**), the idiom “arm to teeth” was substituted by “dress to the teeth” to show the speaker’s feelings and emotions. She is determined to wear full make-up and dress like a real lady in order to look good. This one-time use is not conventionalized because the creation of the idiom variation only suit this occasion.

Because of their syntactic and semantic flexibility, meanings of temporary idioms are not so clear, so readers need to recognize what kind of transformation they have undergone. The following is a classifications of types of idiom variations according to change of elements in different linguistic levels. Some types of idiom variations have been recognized. Among them some most commonly used are: a. Idiom variation caused by phonetic change. (“whine and dine” from “wine and dine”) b. Idiom variation caused by change of lexical elements. (“Walk in love with” from “fall in love with”) c. Idiom variation caused by change of syntactic structure (“like son, like father” from “like father, like son”) d. Idiom variation caused by change of aspect (“the boat has sailed” from “sail the boat”) e. Idiom variation caused by metaphor (“We shall continue to operate on the Italian donkey at both ends, with a carrot and with a stick” from “with a carrot and with a stick”.)

2.1 Studies on Idiom Variation Abroad

Generally speaking, there exist two different views of idiom: compositionality view of idiom and noncompositionality view of idiom. Taylor (2002) points out that compositionality refers to the fact that the meaning of an overall sentence or phrase is determined by its component parts and the way how these component parts are combined.

Katz and Postal (1963) hold the view that the meaning of idiom is not compositional. Their meaning and form are fixed and should not be separated and substituted by other elements. Idioms can only be treated as long words. Its meaning cannot be determined by the meanings of its component parts and syntactic structures do not permit syntactic flexibility. This view has been regarded inadequate because idioms also show high level of variation. Syntactic flexibility and lexical substitutability is very common.

Idioms are decompositional in that the meaning of idioms can be calculated by its constituent parts. Like normal sentence structures, idioms also enjoy lexical and syntactic flexibility. However, degree of lexical and syntactic flexibility is only a matter of degree.

Scholars have studied idiom variations by focusing on a particular linguistic level and from various theoretical perspectives. Fraser, B (1970) and Cowie, A.P (1999) adopt the approach in transformational generative linguistics and analyze the syntactic behaviors of idioms.

In his article “*Idioms within a Transformational Grammar*”, Fraser, B (1970) sets out a hierarchy of seven degrees of idiom ranging from completely free to completely frozen in terms of idiomaticity. This seven-hierarchy model is as follows:

- L6 – Unrestricted: read the riot act.
- L5 – Reconstitution: pop the question.
- L4 – Extraction: draw a blank
- L3 – Permutation: keep up one’s end
- L2 – Insertion: drop a line
- L1 – Adjunction: kick the bucket
- L0 – Completely frozen: face the music

By using terms in transformational grammar, Frazer proposes that at the highest level, the idiom has undergone almost all traditional transformation like “read the riot act.” While idioms at the lowest level like level zero are completely frozen and they do not allow transformation of any kind.

The most important contribution by Fraser to the study of idiom is that it provides the most insightful treatment of idioms from the transformational generative standpoint and his work leads up to the birth of two volumes of the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* (1975, 1983) and the *Longman Dictionary of English idioms* (1979). In these two volumes, transformational constraints on all the idioms are listed by following Frazer’s idea. What distinguishes the two dictionaries is the grammatical and lexical information of idioms in the volumes. The grammatical and lexical information in these two dictionaries mainly include: the grammatical pattern, possible variations, and transformational potential of idioms. The compilation of these two dictionaries shows the practical applications of contemporary linguistic theory in language use.

Apart from the “syntactic approach” by B. Fraser (1970), the other scholars have done research in this area from different points of view. In her book, “*Idioms and Idiomaticity*”, Chitra Fernando (2000) probed into the function of idioms. She analyzed how idioms may transform and argued that transformation and manipulation of idioms are used to meet the speaker’s communicative needs. She discussed four most usual transformations, including substitution, addition, permutation and deletion. Elements in idioms are substituted, added, permuted or deleted to achieve certain communicative effects. For example, addition of a new element may make the message more precise and clearer. By deleting parts of the original idiom, speakers want to show their fluency and confidence.

2.2 Studies on Idiom Variation in China

In China, a lot of scholars have studied idiom variation. In China, Peiji Zhang is the representative in the academic world. He studied on English idioms very early and now many English learners accepted his opinions, and many researchers continued to study English idiom variations following his step.

Peiji Zhang (1980) believes that just like Chinese idioms, English idiom is not fixed and has its own variation, not so fixed. Within the development of words and language, idioms as a member of language also change but their changes are not as notable as other words. According to his study, English idioms transform from different angles, such as emerging of new idioms, eliminating of old idioms. English idioms can be divided into two groups, variations that have already been accepted by people, as “A round peg in a square hole”, we can also say “A square peg in a round hole”, and other variations in order to match with the context or add some special effects. And Peiji Zhang (1980) focuses on the study of nonce variation of English idioms, and he classifies the nonce variation into the following types: crossing off some words from idioms, replacement, adding words into idioms and other types.

And he believes sometimes the writers would change the idioms in a flexible way, which makes it hard to understand its meaning if not knowing prototype idioms. And Peiji Zhang (1980) suggests that English learners should not only pay attention on English idioms but also focus on the variations, which will help English learners understand English idiom variations.

Most of scholars agree to divide idiom variations into two broad groups: normal variation, nonce variation. Normal variation includes lexical variation such as verb, noun and adjective variation, passivization, nominalization, embedding, truncation, topicalization and idiom schema. Nonce variation has many types: replacement, reversion, modification, negation, extraction, distribution, and combination of different idioms. Chenguang Chang (2003) studied English idioms from the systematic functional perspective. He argued that idioms are a resource for making interpersonal meanings and that the use of idioms contributes to all the different aspects of interpersonal management. By using idiom variations, speakers can express their attitudes and evaluation. In his another paper, he explored into the discourse function of idiom variations, maintaining that idiom variations are conducive to cohesion of the whole text. In some master thesis, people also focused upon the discussion of idiom variation from the perspective of Halliday's functional grammar. By applying Halliday's interpersonal function and textual function, they proposed that idiom variations are active in building up personal relationships and effective in creating coherent texts by establishing cohesive ties within context.

3. Idiom Variation in the Framework of Subjectivity

According to cognitive linguistics, language is use-based. Language is shaped by people's actual use and people's experiences in the world. There are cognitive and pragmatic factors underlying every linguistic expression. In the same way, idiom variations are the direct results of language use. The creation of idiom variation needs the language user's participation and involvement. In this process, it is inevitable that speaker's self will be reflected in language. According to "prototype theory" proposed by Rosch (1973), when people categorize objects they match them to "the prototype", i.e. an "ideal exemplar", which contains the most representative features inside the category. Objects that do not share all the characteristics of the prototype are still members of the category but not prototypical ones. She argued that prototypes represent a "basic level of categorization", e.g. "chair", as opposed to a "superordinate", e.g. "furniture" and a "subordinate" level, e.g. "kitchen chair". The prototype theory has been particularly fruitful in providing several researchers with a convenient explanation of some phenomena in studies of vocabulary acquisition and teaching, mental lexicon, as well as in studies of cognitive linguistics and linguistic data.

By using the prototype theory, we can say that all the variations of the same idiom establish a family of related idioms with each expressing related meanings. The original form and meaning are prototypical and the others are derived from the prototype and they share family resemblance. What is the relationship between prototypical idiom and its variant? How does the new form and new meaning arise? The answer to these questions is subjectivity. Speaker's affect, perspective and modality constitute the motivation for the formation of idiom variations. Idiom variations reflect the expression of self and the representation of a speaker's perspective or point of view. By changing phonetic, lexical or structural patterns or applying other strategies, language users involve themselves in the language they use and in this way their attitude, feelings and perspectives are revealed in text.

As has been analyzed in the previous chapters, both the compositional and decompositional views of idiom are inadequate and we need a better and more convincing view to account for idiom variation. Idioms are neither totally arbitrary nor conventional. Rather, we can put idiom in a hierarchy with different levels of compositionality. Idiomaticity is a continuum in the sense that idioms located on the extreme of this idiomaticity continuum are either highly frozen or highly unrestricted and allow modification. However, most idioms are located in the middle of the continuum. They enjoy certain degree of idiomaticity and allow flexible uses. These large number of idiom variation demonstrate that we need a systemic theory to account for this universal linguistic phenomenon.

Fillmore (1988) studied idiom from the perspective of constructional grammar. He classified idioms into substantive idiom and formal idiom. The forms of substantive idiom are fixed and formal idioms are flexible both in syntactic structure and semantic content and they enjoy high productivity. In constructional grammar, all idioms are constructions in the sense a lot of idioms (mostly in Fillmore's term, schematic idioms) are irregular in terms of morphology, sense and structure. Their meaning and syntactic rules do not conform to the usual pattern of semantics and syntax.

Goldberg (1999) didn't agree with the view of compositionality. She proposed that constructions are the central element of grammar. The primary unit of grammar is the grammatical construction rather than the atomic syntactic unit. Grammar is viewed as an inventory of constructions. A construction is a form-meaning pair which cannot always be predicted or derived from any general rules of the language, or from the components of the pair. The form-meaning correspondence is idiosyncratic and conventional to a speech community.

Goldberg's definition of construction is as follows:

C is a construction if C is a form-meaning pair of $\langle F_i, S_i \rangle$ such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from other previously established constructions.

From the above definition we can see that idioms are also constructions. Idioms are not peripheral and marginal in the language system. They enjoy equal status as normal structures and expressions. Goldberg regards idioms as independent constructions because their semantic interpretation does not follow general syntactic rules. Idioms are *gestalts*. They have overall structures and each idiom has its own constructional meaning.

Just as normal syntactic structures, some idiomatic constructions are productive. The constructional meaning of the original idiom will determine which element can be changed to allow another legitimate element to enter this idiomatic construction. They manifest normal syntactic rules and permit syntactic and lexical variation. There are unique semantic and syntactic rules. Idioms can be modified to show syntactic and semantic flexibility. The study of idiom variation has attracted scholar's attention home and abroad. Different theories have been proposed to offer explanation to this ubiquitous linguistic phenomenon. Subjectivity is not new to linguistics. With the development of cognitive linguistics, at the present time we are witnessing a return of interest to the humanistic aspect of language. In traditional linguistic analysis which is dominated by formal approach, language is viewed as form and expression of propositional thought and concepts and meaning are supposed to be "autonomous" from the body. Little attention has been given to language use in context and language users' cognition. However, according to cognitive linguistics, language is not the pure representation of outside world. Rather, language use is the result of human conceptualization. In the process of conceptualizing the world, speaker's bodily experiences, perception, and feeling are all involved and are reflected in the language they use. So it is obvious that language is not the pure representation of the outside world. It also represents speaker's perspective and expresses his self and point of view.

It is this humanistic aspect of subjectivity that is the focus of our study. Structural and formal linguistics focus more on language as the expression of *objective* propositions. As Lyons (1982, p. 101-124) has noted, "Modern Anglo-American linguistics has been dominated by the intellectualist prejudice that language is, essentially, if not solely, an instrument for the expression of propositional thought".

The past linguistic theories have been greatly influenced by objectivism. The objectivist view holds that there is an objective reality, which is independent from people. They are objectively, absolutely, and unconditionally true and false. The objectivist believes that human beings are subjective. Their being subjective will lead to errors, illusions and make false judgment. As a result, we should not rely on our subjective perception. We need scientific methods to achieve understanding and form unbiased point of view. As for language, objectivism is of the view that words have fixed meanings. Language is the mirror of the outside world. They have one-to-one correspondence. Meanings of language are clear and precise and can fit reality accurately. Therefore, by using direct and straightforward words, people can speak objectively, and precisely about the external world.

On the contrary, subjectivism believes that emotion, intuitive insight, imagination, humaneness, art transcend so all-called objective reality or objective truth. Language means what the users choose it to mean. Subjectivists think that empiricism excludes people's imagination and emotion. In fact, total objectivism is impossible. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) said: "Any human conceptual system is mostly metaphorical in nature, and that, therefore, there is no fully objective, unconditional, or absolute truth." Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have offered us the third choice: An Experiential Synthesis. It denies that subjectivity and objectivity are our only choices and reject objectivist view that there is absolute and unconditional truth.

This approach bridges the gap between the objectivist and subjectivist. Truth is relative to understanding, which means that there is no absolute standpoint from which to obtain absolute objective truths about the world. Truth is relative to our conceptual system, which is grounded in, and constantly tested by, our experiences and those of other members of our culture in our daily inter-actions with other people and with our physical and cultural environments.

The myth of objectivism has dominated Western culture, and in particular Western philosophy, from the Presocratics to the present day. The view that we have access to absolute and unconditional truths about the world is the cornerstone of the Western philosophical tradition. The myth of objectivity has flourished in both the rationalist and empiricist traditions. The objectivist tradition in Western philosophy is preserved to this day in the descendants of the logical positivists, the Fregean tradition, the tradition of Husserl, and, in linguistics, in the neorationalism that came out of the Chomsky tradition.

A theory of meaning for natural language is based on a theory of truth, independent of the way people understand and use language. Meaning is objective and disembodied, independent of human understanding. The meaning of a sentence can be obtained from the meanings of its parts and the structure of the sentence. Truth is therefore not

absolute or objective but is based on understanding. Thus sentences do not have inherent, objectively given meanings, and communication cannot be merely the transmission of such meanings. Sentences have the same objective meaning from all the people who use them. It will be true if it meets the truth-conditions. A person understands the objective meaning of a sentence if he understands the conditions under which it would be true or false.

Experientialism answers no to both questions. Meaning is always meaning to a person. What's meaningful to me is a matter of what has significance for me. And what is significant for me will not depend on my rational knowledge alone but on my past experiences, values, feelings, and intuitive insights. Meaning is not cut and dried; it is a matter of imagination and a matter of constructing coherence. The objectivist emphasis on achieving a universally valid point of view misses what is important, insightful, and coherent for the individual.

Communication is not a matter of transmitting message with fixed meaning through the conduit to the hearer. The message will be processed by the language user and add some personal elements. Meaning of a sentence depends on the way how a given person happens to understand it or construct it. We *understand* the world through our *interactions* with it. Human understanding is possible only by using the primary resources of the imagination. Meaning is constructed by relying on the speaker's subjective imagination, emotions and judgments. It has subjective elements. On the basis of the previous analysis, we can conclude that subjectivity is a feature in language. In almost all the expression, we can find out some traces of subjectivity. In idiom variation, speakers make alteration to existing idiom because there are certain expressive needs or because they need to convey their feelings and perspectives. Scholars in the past are mainly interested in studying idiom variation from transformational generative paradigm and functional linguistics. Little attention has been paid to cognitive study of idiom variation. As a matter of fact, idiom variations are largely the result of speaker's intention and expressive needs. There are a lot of subjective factors which determine or influence speaker's linguistic choice. Not recognizing the underlying cognitive and pragmatic factors in language use, transformational approach to the study of idiom variation is too formal in nature. It can not offer an adequate explanation for idiom variation in use. By focusing on the three metafunctions of language, functional linguistics answers the question why speakers choose to vary their uses of idiom from the perspective of function language plays in communication. But it does not give due attention to speaker's cognitive factors.

One of the features of idiom is its expression of affect. Idioms have an evaluation or affective stance towards what they describe. As linguistic construction, idiom is ready-made and can be used to express a complete idea of the speaker. Speaker's evaluation and affective information is embedded in idiom (Croft, W. & Alan D. Cruse, 2004). In the same manner, in order to add extra meanings or express intentions, speakers tend to alter the existing idiom to convey more meanings. Idiom variation is motivated by speaker's subjective needs to express his subjectivity.

4. Conclusion

By studying idiom variation from the perspective of subjectivity, subjective feelings, perspective, judgments and expectation in using a modified idiom are examined. It conforms to the fact that language is use-based and subjectively motivated. An elaborated analysis of idiom variation in the framework of linguistic subjectivity will offer us new insight into the issue we are discussing and uncover the hidden motivation behind linguistic facts.

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