

Changes of First-Person Pronoun Pragmatic Functions in Three Historical Chinese Texts

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Abstract : The existence of multiple first-person pronouns (1PPs) in classical Chinese is an issue that has not been resolved despite linguists using the grammatical perspective. This paper proposes pragmatics as a viable solution. There is also a lack of research exploring the evolving usage patterns of 1PPs within the historical context of Chinese language use. Such research can help us comprehend the changes and developments of these linguistic elements. To fill these research gaps, we use the diachronic pragmatics approach to contrast the functions of Chinese 1PPs in three representative texts from three different historical periods: The Analects (The Spring and Autumn Period), The Grand Scribe's Records (Grand Records) (Qin and Han Period), and A New Account of Tales of the World (New Account) (The Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Period). The 1PPs of these texts are manually identified and classified according to the pragmatic functions in the given contexts to observe their historical changes, understand the factors that contribute to these changes, and provide possible answers to the development of how wo became the only 1PP in today's spoken Mandarin.

Keywords : historical, Chinese, pronouns, pragmatics

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