

如何在中文裡定位疼痛：回覆 Liu 與 Klein

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摘 要

有些哲學家主張疼痛是一種處於身體部位的對象，理由是英文可以用定位句式說明疼痛是允許的。最近，Liu 與 Klein 檢視中文對於說明疼痛的用法，指出中文不允許用定位句式說明疼痛。然而，我主張他們是錯的，我提供實例來論證如何在中文裡使用定位句式來說明疼痛。

關鍵字：疼痛、身體理論、定位句式、中文與英文跨語言研究

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How to Locate Pain in Mandarin: Reply to Liu and Klein

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Abstract

Some philosophers argue that pain is an object located in bodily parts because the locative form of pain report is permissible in English. To examine this argument, Liu and Klein recently argue that the linguistic argument cannot work because the locative form is impermissible in Mandarin. They are wrong, however. I demonstrate that the locative form in Mandarin is not only permissible but also common.

Keywords: pain, bodily theory, locative form, cross-linguistic study between Mandarin and English

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The bodily theory of pain maintains that pains are perceptible objects located in body parts. To support it, philosophers often point to linguistic evidence: the locative form of pain report is grammatically permissible and natural. For example, ‘I am experiencing pain in my upper left thigh’, and ‘there is a throbbing pain in my left thigh’ (Aydede, 2019). As these sentences suggest, pain is perceptible, quantifiable, and located in some part of our body.

One common objection to this sort of linguistic argument is that analytic philosophers often look at linguistic evidence only from English. This naturally prompts a worry that the locative form of pain report is merely an artefact of English. To ease this worry, one way is to examine evidence from other languages: if more languages share the locative form of pain report, it is more plausible to maintain that it corresponds to reality.¹

¹ For how a cross-linguistic study could help uncover conceptual truths, see (Wierzbicka, 2012). A broader worry is how the surface features of languages reveal objects’ nature. However, I cannot address to it here. My aim is to argue that the linguistic data provided by Liu and Klein are inadequate, not to question the whole approach.

In this context, we should applaud that Michelle Liu and Colin Klein (2020) have undertaken such a cross-linguistic study. They gather evidence for Mandarin—and find that the locative form of pain report does not exist in Mandarin. Since Mandarin has the largest number of native speakers, their research suggests that the locative form of pain reports is an artefact of the English language.

Let me briefly summarise their argument. They show that pain reports in Mandarin can be constructed only in the predicative form: to use their example, ‘我的背很痛’ (‘My back is very sore’). In contrast, the locative form is impermissible in Mandarin. Liu and Klein distinguish four features of the locative form in English and argue that those features are odd and even ungrammatical in Mandarin (the linguistic examples in the following four paragraphs are from Liu and Klein).

1. The locative form in English can use a prepositional phrase to indicate where pain is located, like ‘I am experiencing pain *in* my upper left thigh’. In contrast, Mandarin does not use prepositional phrases to report the location of pain; instead, the location of pain is usually specified by the subject of the sentence, like ‘我的肚子痛’ (‘My stomach hurts’).
2. The locative form in English allows *existential construction*, like ‘*there is a pain*’. An equivalent to ‘there is’ in Mandarin is ‘有’. But an existential construction of pain report in Mandarin—for instance, ‘我耳朵後面有痛’—sounds very odd.

3. Pain is countable in English, like ‘a pain’. But a literal translation of ‘a pain’ in Mandarin—‘一個疼痛’—is ungrammatical. Pain in Mandarin is not countable.
4. The possessive construction of pain report is permissible in English (‘I have a pain in my back’). Like existential construction, Mandarin also uses ‘有’ to express possessive construction. But the possessive construction of pain report—like ‘我有痛’—is impermissible in Mandarin.

While the above arguments are plausible, I argue that Liu and Klein do not cover linguistic evidence in Mandarin sufficiently. They ignore one way to construct the locative form of pain report in Mandarin. The cross-linguistic evidence from Mandarin, therefore, does not rule out the possibility that pains are objects spatially located in bodily parts.

To construct the locative form of pain reports, Mandarin speakers can use the phrase ‘疼痛的感覺’ (‘feeling(s) of pain’). Admittedly, this phrase is verbose and less elegant, but it is very common in Mandarin as well as English. Compare ‘my back feels painful’ with ‘there is an intense feeling of pain in my back’. True, the former sentence is stylishly better and more frequent than the latter. But remember the issue here is about whether such constructions are *linguistically permissible* and *grammatical*. I argue that constructions of pain report by using the phrase ‘feeling of pain’ in Mandarin are permissible. Indeed, it is very common. I search the phrase in Mandarin through Google, which produces more than four millions of search results. Below, I argue that the four features of the locative form Liu and Klein

indicate can also be found in Mandarin if the report uses the phrase of ‘feeling of pain’. All of my examples are cited from Google.

1. Existential Construction/the Prepositional Phrase

The preposition in Mandarin equivalent to ‘in’ is ‘裡’ or ‘內’. To report the location of pain, it is usually used with an existential construction (the Mandarin equivalent to ‘there is’ is ‘有’. I search the existential construction that uses either preposition in Google and get 78,800 and 66,700 results respectively. Here are some of the results:

- (1) 嘴裡有疼痛的感覺 ‘There is a feeling of pain in the mouth’
- (2) 我可以聽出那聲音裡有疼痛的感覺 ‘I can hear there is a feeling of pain in that voice’
- (3) 我心內有疼痛的感覺 ‘There is a feeling of pain in my heart’

2. Countable Noun

While ‘疼’ or ‘痛’ is uncountable, ‘疼痛的感覺’ is countable. Adding ‘一個’ (equivalent to ‘a’ or ‘an’) to it and searching the phrase in Google, I get 8,540 results:

- (1) 用一個疼痛的感覺去掩蓋不安情緒 ‘Use a feeling of pain to cover up anxiety’
- (2) 這個表情符號表示一個疼痛的感覺 ‘This emoji represents a feeling of pain’

3. Possessive Construction

‘有’ is also used to express possession. Adding it before ‘疼痛的感覺’, we can find 505,000 results in Google (though many of them should be interpreted as existential constructions):

- (1) 胎兒什麼時候開始有疼痛的感覺 ‘When does the foetus start to have feelings of pain’
- (2) 昆蟲有疼痛的感覺嗎 ‘Do insects have feelings of pain’

While I do not intend to defend the bodily theory of pain, the evidence demonstrates that Liu and Klein are wrong. Cross-linguistic study could be useful, but Liu and Klein fail to show from Mandarin that the locative form of pain reports in an artefact of the English language.

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