The curious case of the negatively biased Mandarin belief verb ˇyiwéi

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**Puzzle** Within the rich literature on belief reports (e.g. Hintikka 1969, Heim 1992, Anand and Hacquard 2014 a.o.), negatively biased belief reports, such as Mandarin ˇyiwéi, remain relatively untouched. ˇYiwéi suggests that its complement is incorrect; (1) alone strongly suggests that the person is not an expert. But this sense of incorrectness is not an entailment; the continuation (2) subverts expectations but is fully coherent.

(1) rénmén ˇyiwéi tā shì gè zhùnjiā
person-pl ˇyiwéi 3sg be CL expert
“People are under the impression that he’s an expert ”
(2) ér tā díquè shì
and 3sg indeed be
“and he really is”

ˇYiwéi is especially interesting in the first person, since one must reconcile the speakers reported belief with the skepticism conveyed by ˇyiwéi. Usually, first-person ˇyiwéi communicates that the speaker previously held the belief but now has evidence to the contrary ((3)). First-person ˇyiwéi can also be used as a hedged way of reporting a belief that the speaker currently holds ((4)).

(3) Wˇo ˇyiwéi jintiàn yˇou ge jiˇangzuˇo
I ˇyiwéi today have CL talk
“I previously thought there was a talk today”
(4) wˇo gˇerˇen ˇyiwéi nˇi yˇingg āi zhˇeyˇang
I personally ˇyiwéi you should this-way zuˇo
do
“Personally, I think you should do this”

ˇYiwéi displays conflicting behavior under entailment-cancelling operators. Usually, its sense of incorrectness projects. But surprisingly, to the extent that ˇyiwéi is acceptable under negation, its sense of incorrectness disappears.

**Goals** The goals of this talk are: (i) to lay out original data; (ii) to pin down ˇyiwéi’s elusive sense of wrongness; (ii) to derive its rather surprising behavior in the first person and under embeddings; and (iii) to situate ˇyiwéi within a typology of strategies for reporting beliefs that the speaker does not necessarily endorse.

**Analysis** I propose that x ˇyiwéi P conventionally implicates that the CG remain consistent with ¬P after the update. Thus ˇyiwéi tells the hearers not to update with the prejacent no matter how reliable the belief-holder is or how plausible they find P to be. This unusual framing then gives rise to a conversational implicature that the speaker disbelieves the complement or wants to hedge it. Grounding the sense of incorrectness in a CI also accounts for its projection behavior. Under negation, the sense of incorrectness dissipates because x does not ˇyiwéi P means that x does not believe P, and ˇyiwéi’s conventional implicature suggests that P may be incorrect anyway.

**Significance** More broadly, the investigation aims to illuminate the typology of lexical resources speakers use to direct the pragmatically complex process of deciding whether to uptake reported beliefs. I argue that three types of Mandarin belief reports contribute the same at-issue content (“believe”), but differ in their backgrounded requirements about how the belief relates to the CG: zhídào “know” takes the belief as given, rènwéi “think” does not specify, and ˇyiwéi requires the CG to allow that the belief is false.