

Original Paper

The Baseline/Elaboration Model for the Constructional Meaning of Chinese “V₁OV₂de” Construction

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Received: June 29, 2023

Accepted: July 20, 2023

Online Published: August 11, 2023

doi:10.22158/elsr.v4n3p127

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/elsr.v4n3p127>

Abstract

Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction has its special syntactic features. The traditional grammar of formal linguistics finds it difficult to analyse this atypical and marginal construction, but the theory of baseline/elaboration in Cognitive Grammar can provide a solution for it. The paper studies the constructional meaning of “V₁OV₂de” construction based on the theory of baseline/elaboration model. It draws a conclusion that “V₁OV₂de” construction has two constructional meanings: “cause-effect relationship” and “non-cause-effect relationship”. In addition, it also discusses the reasons why the verb appears for the second time in “V₁OV₂de” construction. The constructional meanings of “V₁OV₂de” construction are generated because of the two same verbs.

Keywords

baseline/elaboration model, “v₁ov₂de” construction, constructional meaning

1. Introduction

Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction is a pervasive expression in our daily communication, such as “眼睛充血, 熬夜熬的” and “上学迟到了, 堵车堵的”. Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction poses a challenge to the concept of form-meaning mapping, the theoretical foundation of Construction Grammar. Goldberg (1995, 2006) proposed that a construction that has special forms, meaning and functions is form-meaning mapping. A construction has its independent construction status in terms of its unpredictable form, meaning and function. Although a construction has its predictable form, meaning and function, this construction is used frequently. The same is true of the construction that has predictable form, meaning and function, such as “I Love You”. The unpredictability of forms refers to the grammatical rules can not interpret the form of a construction. The unpredictability of meaning and function refers to the meaning and function of a construction are not a few words comprised of it, such as “What’s X Doing Y”. Its

constructional meaning indicates that someone shows surprise, dissatisfaction and rage. As mentioned above, Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction has its independent construction status because of the two same verbs. The grammatical rules can not give an explanation to this special syntactic form. The form of Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction is unpredictable. The same is true of its meaning, namely, constructional meaning. We will elaborate on it in chapter three.

There are few studies on Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction and the previous studies are limited to the properties of “de”. Huang Guoying (1982) thinks “de” is a cause of a state of an affair. This paper does not agree with his view. Liu Xueqin (2012) reckons “的” comes from “得”. Liu Xueqin (2012), Tang Ling (2016) and Chen Yu (2021) view Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction as verb-copying construction. However, there is no study on the constructional meaning of Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction. In addition, the previous studies have not given a reason why there are the two same verbs in Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction yet. The paper based on the theory of baseline/elaboration model mainly solves two questions: “What is the constructional meaning of Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction?” and “The reasons why there are the two same verbs in Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction”.

2. Theoretical Basis: Baseline/Elaboration Model

The theory of Baseline/Elaboration was proposed by Langacker (2016), a famous cognitive linguist. Baseline, a term in computer science, was introduced into the study of language. The theory of baseline/elaboration demonstrates a dynamic conceptual process of the meaning of a construction. Many aspects of language and cognition all involve asymmetry (Langacker, 2016). The theory of baseline/elaboration aims to analyse these asymmetric phenomena. The fundamental feature of language is that complex structures are generated from simple structures (Liu C. W. & Liu C. D., 2019). This point is interpreted by the theory of baseline/elaboration perfectly. The theory of baseline/elaboration can totally be a perfect tool to analyse Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction in terms of its asymmetry.

The theory of baseline/elaboration embraces three elements: baseline, elaboration operations and elaboration. The baseline has some kind of priority - being already established, in place, or under control - and is generally more substantive than elaborating elements (Langacker, 2016). Elaboration operations refers to some cognitive operations processing the baseline. Elaboration produces a higher-level and complex baseline. Elaboration operations (E), like a bridge, connect baseline (B) and elaboration (BE).

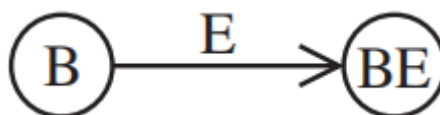


Figure 1. Baseline and Elaboration (Langacker, 2016)

The cognition of humans for the world derives from body experience. Let us look at an example to understand the theory of baseline/elaboration. Suppose a ten-year-old kid's height is baseline (B),

physical growth and development are elaboration operations (E). Finally, a twenty-year-old kid's height is elaboration (BE). Let us look at another example in language, a simple sentence "This girl broke the vase". The nouns "girl" and "vase" and the verb "break" construct the baseline "girl break vase", a lower-level structure. The demonstrative pronoun "this" and definite article "the" elaborate on "girl" and "vase" respectively. The Simple Past Tense elaborates on "break". With these elaboration operations, the final elaboration, a higher-level structure, "This girl broke the vase" is generated. Elaboration does not mean an ending. Namely, elaboration, as a new baseline, can continue to have some elaboration operations. Ultimately, a new elaboration can be generated again. So seriality is an essential feature of the theory of baseline/elaboration.

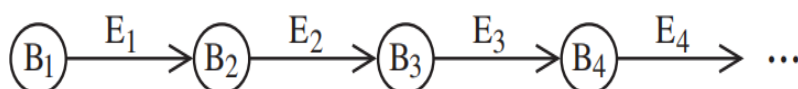


Figure 2. Baseline and Elaboration (Langacker, 2016)

3. The Baseline/Elaboration Model for Chinese “V₁OV₂de” Construction

(1) 昨天买了个菠萝，今天我的牙齿又酸又疼，都是吃菠萝吃的。

(2) 这本书在哪得到的？收书收的。

Sentence (1) “昨天买了个菠萝，今天我的牙齿又酸又疼” means “I bought a pineapple yesterday, and I have sore teeth today”. As a dialogue and communication scene between the two sides, it activates the relationship between pineapples and sore teeth in speaker's and hearer's mind. Eating pineapple results in sore teeth. The baseline, being already established, is more substantive than elaboration. So the latter part “V₁O 吃菠萝” of sentence (1) means eating pineapples. It is primarily established as a baseline, a lower-level structure, in communicators' cognition from a dialogue and communication scene. The baseline “V₁O 吃菠萝” is processed and elaborated by “V₂ 吃的”, so elaboration “V₁OV₂de 吃菠萝吃的” is generated as a higher-level structure. In the meanwhile, the dialogue and communication scene “昨天买了个菠萝，今天我的牙齿又酸又疼” is still highly activated. So elaboration “V₁OV₂de 吃菠萝吃的” explains the relationship between pineapples and sore teeth. “V₁OV₂de 吃菠萝吃的” means the speaker ate too many pineapples. It is the reason why the speaker has sore teeth.

Sentence (2) “这本书在哪得到的？” means “Where did you get this book?”. As a dialogue and communication scene between the two sides, it activates the relationship between a hearer and a book in communicator's mind. So the latter part “V₁O 收书” of sentence (2) means collecting books. It is primarily established as a baseline, a lower-level structure, in communicators' cognition from a dialogue and communication scene. The baseline “V₁O 收书” is processed and elaborated by “V₂ 收的”, so elaboration “V₁OV₂de 收书收的” is generated as a higher-level structure. In the meanwhile, the dialogue and communication scene “这本书在哪得到的？” is still highly activated. So elaboration “V₁OV₂de 收书收的” means “I get this book from collecting books”. It explains the origin of this book, not a reason.

The two sentences above are abbreviated from “吃菠萝吃酸疼的” and “收书收到的”. It is due to the economy of language. In the long history of human beings, people usually want to use the least cognitive effort to obtain the greatest cognitive effect, so the syntactic expression of Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction is reasonable to some extent. By comparing sentence (1) with sentence (2), we find that there are two constructional meanings for Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction: “cause-effect relationship” and “non-cause-effect relationship”.

4. Reasons for the Two Same Verbs in Chinese “V₁OV₂de” Construction

The preceding chapters have analyzed two constructional meanings for Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction: “cause-effect relationship” and “non-cause-effect relationship”. This chapter continues to explain why there are the two same verbs in Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction.

4.1 The Avoidance of Semantic Ambiguity: The Formation of Constructional Meanings

Let us take an attempt to omit the second verb “V₂” in this construction. The two sentences will turn into the following sentences.

(3) 昨天买了个菠萝, 今天我的牙齿又酸又疼, 都是吃菠萝的

(4) 这本书在哪得到的? 收书的

Obviously, we can not grasp the meanings of the two sentences after omitting the second verb “V₂”. “吃菠萝的” means eating pineapples de, and “收书的” means collecting books de. They can not correspond to grammatical rules. The semantic meaning is unclear. Langacker (1987) believes that syntax is serial and progressive, and the following syntactic components inherit or activate the conceptual information contained in the preceding syntactic components. So the second verb “V₂” can not be omitted. The second verb “V₂” conforms the sentence to syntactic rules and avoids semantic ambiguity. The elaboration “V₁OV₂de 吃菠萝吃的” and “V₁OV₂de 收书收的” can accurately express the semantic meaning of sentences. It is precisely because of the existence of the verb “V₂” that the constructional meaning of the Chinese “V₁OV₂” structure is generated, that is “cause-effect relationship” and “non-cause-effect relationship”.

4.2 Figure/Ground Theory

The theory of Figure and Ground, proposed by Edgar Rubin, is a famous theory in psychology. Figure refers to the most prominent entity or event in the human brain’s cognition, and ground refers to the less prominent parts that set off the figure. Edgar Rubin’s Face and Vase diagram best embodies the figure/ground theory, and also proves that there is indeed “cognitive prominence” in our human brain cognition. In sentence (1), the communicators construct conversational scene “have sore teeth after buying pineapples”. Firstly, in communicators’ cognition, The event of “吃菠萝 eating pineapples” will be prioritized and highlighted, but eating pineapples can not accurately express the reasons why the speaker has sore teeth. As the syntax progresses, “V₂ 吃的” will get more highlighted and become figure. At the same time, the cognitive prominence of “V₁O 吃菠萝” will be reduced and become ground. The cognitive prominence of “V₂ 吃的” is stronger than “V₁O 吃菠萝”. “V₂ 吃的” stands for a state of action,

and it is precisely because of the excessive performance of this state of action that it leads to sore teeth. “V₁OV₂de 吃菠萝吃的” means the speaker ate too many pineapples, so he has sore teeth. In sentence (2), the communicators construct conversational scene “Where did you get this book?”. Firstly, in communicators’ cognition, The event of “收书 collecting books” will be prioritized and highlighted, but collecting books can not accurately express semantic meaning. As the syntax progresses, “V₂ 收的” will get more highlighted and become figure. At the same time, the cognitive prominence of “V₁O 收书” will be reduced and become ground. The cognitive prominence of “V₂ 收的” is stronger than “V₁O 收书”. However, sentence (2) does not indicate a cause-effect relationship, it only explains the origin of the book, thus expressing the non cause-effect relationship.

5. Conclusion

This study uses baseline/elaboration model as a methodological tool to explore the constructional meanings of Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction and the reasons why there are the two same verbs. It finds that Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction has two constructional meanings: “cause-effect relationship” and “non-cause-effect relationship”. In Chinese “V₁OV₂de” construction, its constructional meanings are generated because of the two same verbs. Owing to figure/ground theory, the ground “V₁O” sets off the figure “V₂de”. If the second verb “V₂” is performed excessively, it will cause a state of an affair. So it indicates cause-effect relationship. However, if the second verb “V₂” is not performed excessively, it demonstrates non cause-effect relationship.

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