

Original Paper

A Study on the Evaluative Semantics of the “*méi X yìng Y*” Construction and Its Pedagogical Pathways in Chinese Teaching

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Abstract

The internet-popular construction “méi X yìng Y” has emerged with high frequency in recent years, and its holistic meaning exhibits non-compositionality, meeting the defining criteria of constructions in Construction Grammar. Drawing on Goldberg’s Construction Grammar theory, this paper systematically analyzes the formal features, component functions, and syntactic distribution of the “méi X yìng Y” construction. On this basis, it introduces Appraisal Theory to reveal the nature of its evaluative semantics, its evaluative meaning is not a simple positive-negative dichotomy, but rather forms an attitudinal continuum ranging from criticism, ridicule, helplessness and affirmation, with the shift in evaluative orientation constrained by contextual factors, speaker stance, and communicative intent. Finally, grounded in the Sān-Yī Yǔfǎ (Form-Function-Context) approach, this paper proposes a four-step pedagogical pathway for Chinese learners, form recognition, function understanding, contextual judgment and productive application, and designs specific teaching plans with typical contexts, providing a reference for the teaching of internet-popular constructions in L2 Chinese education.

Keywords

“méi X yìng Y” construction, Appraisal Theory, Construction Grammar, Chinese teaching

1. Introduction

The rapid development of internet language has given rise to a large number of emerging constructions. These constructions are concise in form, rich in semantics, and distinct in pragmatic function, making them an undeniable linguistic phenomenon in modern Chinese research. In recent years, a series of “*méi X yìng Y*” formats, such as “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” (forcing hardship when there is none), “*méi qián yìng huā*” (forcing spending when there is no money), “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*” (forcing enjoyment when there is no fortune), and “*méi cái yìng xiù*” (forcing performance when there is no talent) have

appeared with high frequency on social media, short-video platforms, and in everyday spoken language. Their scope of use has continued to expand, and their productivity has steadily increased. The format as a whole conveys the meaning of “forcibly carrying out an action without possessing the necessary conditions”, carrying a distinct evaluative coloring and exhibiting typical constructional features. However, existing research has not paid sufficient attention to this construction. Hou(2024) analyzed the intergenerational value differences reflected in “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” and “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*” from a socio-psychological perspective but did not provide a systematic linguistic description of the construction itself. Hu(2023) and Shen(2012), while addressing the application of internet words in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, focused primarily on general internet vocabulary and rarely touched upon internet-popular expressions at the constructional level. From a theoretical perspective, Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995, 2006) provides effective tools for analyzing such fixed formats, while Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) offers a systematic framework for revealing their pragmatic functions. The combination of these two approaches enables a more in-depth description and explanation of the construction’s formal features, semantic connotations, and pragmatic functions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Construction Grammar and Research on Internet-Popular Constructions

Since Goldberg’s proposal, Construction Grammar has become an important theoretical tool in Chinese grammatical research. Goldberg defined constructions as “form-meaning pairings”, with the core criterion being that the overall meaning of a construction cannot be directly derived from its component parts (Goldberg, 1995, p. 4). Subsequently, Goldberg (2006, p. 5) further relaxed the definition, pointing out that even if the meaning of a structure can be fully predicted, it can still be regarded as a construction as long as it appears with sufficient frequency. This revision provided a theoretical basis for the constructional status of numerous semi-fixed formats in internet language.

In Chinese linguistics, Construction Grammar has been widely applied to the analysis of various fixed formats and emerging constructions. Lu (2016) systematically expounded the application value of Construction Grammar theory in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, pointing out that construction-based teaching helps learners holistically grasp the correspondence between linguistic form and meaning. Shi (2016) proposed “Interactive Construction Grammar”, further emphasizing the dynamic, emergent, and interactive nature of constructions, offering a more explanatory perspective for the study of internet-popular constructions. In terms of specific construction studies, Xu (2019) systematically analyzed “*wǒ jiào (ràng) nǐ VP*”, Ding (2020) examined “*ài X jiù X*”, and Wang (2022) investigated “*néng X jiù X*”. These studies provide methodological references for the present research. However, existing studies have not yet given systematic attention to the recently emerged high-frequency construction “*méi X yìng Y*”; its formal patterns, semantic features, and pragmatic functions all await in-depth description.

2.2 Appraisal Theory and Research on Stance Expression

Appraisal Theory, proposed by Martin and White (2005) within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics, is a systematic framework for studying attitudes, stances, and evaluative resources in discourse. The theory divides evaluative resources into three subsystems: Attitude, including Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation; Engagement, concerning the speaker's alignment of stances toward multiple voices in discourse; and Graduation, concerning the scaling of evaluative intensity.

In Chinese linguistics, Appraisal Theory has been employed to analyze the evaluative functions of various linguistic phenomena. Fang (2017) explored the forms and functions of stance expression in Chinese spoken language from an interactional linguistic perspective. Chen and Zhu (2021) analyzed the pragmatic functions of internet-popular constructions, pointing out that evaluativity is an important feature of such constructions. Li (2000) studied the category of quantity in Chinese, touching upon subjective quantity, which has implications for understanding the evaluative intensity of constructions. However, systematic application of Appraisal Theory to the analysis of internet-popular constructions remains relatively rare, which provides theoretical space for this paper to reveal the semantic nature of “*méi X yìng Y*” from an evaluative perspective.

2.3 Research Design

Based on the above literature review, this paper aims to provide a systematic formal description of “*méi X yìng Y*” within the Construction Grammar framework, introduce Appraisal Theory to reveal the internal mechanisms of its evaluative semantics, and draw on the *Sān-Yī Yǔfǎ* approach to explore pedagogical pathways for L2 teaching. The corpus for this study is primarily derived from the following sources: (1) public posts containing the “*méi X yìng Y*” format on Sina Weibo from January 2023 to December 2024, from which 187 valid instances were manually screened; (2) natural language data from relevant topic tags and comment sections on short-video platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu; and (3) news reports and online comments from portal websites including Baidu and Tencent that involve this construction. All corpus data were manually annotated, with annotation categories including construction variant types, parts of speech of X and Y, syntactic positions, and evaluative orientations. This paper adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, conducting frequency statistics and functional analyses based on the annotated corpus.

3. Constructional Features of “*méi X yìng Y*”

3.1 Formal Features: The Interaction between Fixed and Variable Components

Analysis of relevant examples of the internet-popular expression “*méi X yìng Y*” reveals that it is formally composed of variable components X and Y and fixed components “*méi*” and “*yìng*”. The fixed components occupy fixed positions and are not replaceable; the variable positions are open but constrained by the construction's overall semantics. The structure is illegitimate if any component is missing. Moreover, the meaning of “*méi X yìng Y*” cannot be directly derived from the literal meanings of its variable and fixed components; the structural meaning is greater than the sum of the meaning of

its parts. Each component contributes to the constructional meaning, but the constructional meaning cannot be predicted from the components alone.

“*méi X yìng Y*” is extensively used in online communicative contexts. This paper selects a portion of the corpus for analysis:

(1) The older generation engages in “*méi kǔ yìng chī*”, creating illness when there is none, and stubbornly enduring illness when there is one.” (Source: Tencent News, “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” vs “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*”, 2024)

(2) “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” refers to younger generations criticizing older generations for being overly frugal, even “seeking hardship unnecessarily.” From the older generation’s perspective, however, many young people are engaging in “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*”, i.e., investing limited money into what they consider the most cost-effective forms of enjoyment. (Source: Zhou Shanshan, “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” and “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*”)

(3) “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*” is an internet meme, recently summarized and joked about by netizens as a life state: the older generation engages in “*méi kǔ yìng chī*”, while the younger generation engages in “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*”. (Source: Sanmao Human Resources Network, What is the meme “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*” and what does it mean?)

(4) Elderly people insist on buying expensive health supplements, while young people are keen on cosmetic procedures. This behavior of “*méi bìng yìng zhì*” (forcibly treating illness when there is none) is similar to “*méi kǔ yìng chī*”. (Source: Online corpus)

(5) In contrast to the older generation’s “having air conditioning but not using it”, young people today are “*méi qián yìng huā*”, commonly seen as “earning 5,000 yuan a month but daring to buy a 20,000-yuan bag”, achieving a “pseudo-refined lifestyle” through credit card installment plans and consumer loans. (Source: Online corpus)

(6) Check-in style blind dating to escape single anxiety, or reluctantly entering marriage to conform to the social clock, a growing number of young people are engaging in “*méi ài yìng tán*” (forcibly dating when there is no love). (Source: Online corpus)

(7) The behavior of young parents who “*méi wá yìng jī*” (forcibly pushing children when there are none), hoarding early childhood education courses and prenatal music during pregnancy that stems from the same intergenerational transmission of a sense of security as the elderly’s “having fresh fruit but not eating it”. (Source: Online corpus)

(8) Clocking in at the gym in the early morning but leaving after taking staged photos, many “self-discipline” bloggers are in fact “*méi cái yìng xiù*”, deliberately creating a “pseudo-self-discipline” persona. (Source: Online corpus)

From the above examples, it can be observed that the variable component X is predominantly a monosyllabic noun or adjective. Corpus statistics show that nouns account for approximately 61.5% of X, such as “*cái*” (talent) in “*méi cái yìng xiù*” and “*qián*” (money) in “*méi qián yìng huā*”. Adjectives account for approximately 33.7% of X, such as “*kǔ*” (hardship) in “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” and “*fú*” (fortune)

in “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*”. Other parts of speech account for the remaining 4.8%. The variable component Y is always a monosyllabic verb, such as “*chī*” (eat), “*xiǎng*” (enjoy), “*huā*” (spend), “*zhì*” (treat), “*tán*” (date), and “*chuǎng*” (forge ahead).

There is a semantic association between X and Y: X and Y can combine to form the verb-object phrase “Y+X”, such as “*chī kǔ*” (endure hardship), “*xiǎng fú*” (enjoy fortune), “*huā qián*” (spend money), “*zhì bìng*” (treat illness), “*tán ài*” (date/fall in love), and “*chuǎng lù*” (forge a path). This means that X is semantically the object or condition that Y concerns. From a logical perspective, X is a condition or resource that the referent lacks, while Y is an action that the referent is implementing or attempting to implement. “*méi X*” is a statement of objective state, while “*yìng Y*” is a description of subjective behavior; the two form a semantic contrast, the former negates the existence of the condition, while the latter emphasizes the occurrence of the action. It is worth noting that not all combinations of X and Y are permissible in “*méi X yìng Y*”. Corpus data show that X and Y must satisfy a semantic compatibility condition: Y semantically presupposes the existence of X, or the possession of X makes Y more reasonable. For example, “*chī fàn*” (eat a meal) does not presuppose the existence of “*kǔ*” (hardship), but “*chī kǔ*” (endure hardship) takes “*kǔ*” as its semantic object. Similarly, “*xiǎng fú*” (enjoy fortune) presupposes the existence of “*fú*” (fortune); therefore, when the speaker says “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*”, the critical meaning lies in “enjoying fortune when there is no fortune to enjoy”. This semantic presupposition mechanism is an important foundation for the evaluative meaning generated by the “*méi X yìng Y*” construction.

3.2 Functions of the Fixed Components

Marked components in a construction have a cueing function and are assumed by grammatical components in fixed positions. In the “*méi X yìng Y*” construction, the marked components are the fixed components “*méi*” and “*yìng*”. In addition to the marked components, there is also a relatively free variable component. In the “*méi X yìng Y*” construction, the variable components are X and Y, which carry the core semantics of the entire construction. In communicative contexts, we need to constrain the pragmatics of the construction according to the semantics of the variable components. From this perspective, we consider “*méi X yìng Y*” as a marked construction for research purposes. Among its components, “*méi*” and “*yìng*” are fixed components, i.e., the marked components of the construction, which cannot be altered or deleted; otherwise, the original constructional meaning would change. Although X and Y are variable, the words that enter these positions are also constrained by the construction.

“*méi*” and “*yìng*”, as marked components, delimit the positions of the variable components in the construction and assume different functions within it. The objective negation function of “*méi*”, as a negative adverb, it objectively negates the possession state of X. “*méi X*” is a statement of fact that the referent does not possess the condition or resource X. This negation is objective and neutral, carrying no evaluative coloring in itself. The evaluative triggering function of “*yìng*”. It is the core trigger of the construction’s evaluative meaning. The Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition) defines the adverbial

sense of “yìng” as “reluctantly; stubbornly” (e.g., “yìng chēng” stubbornly hold on, “yìng tǐng” stubbornly endure). In “méi X yìng Y”, “yìng” not only conveys the behavioral manner of “reluctance and stubbornness” but also projects this stubbornness into the logical contradiction of “knowing that conditions are not met yet still forcibly acting”, thereby activating the evaluative function of the entire construction. The presence of “yìng” shifts the construction from objective statement to subjective evaluation, it signals that the speaker is not describing facts but rather judging the reasonableness of a certain behavior. Furthermore, “yìng” also assumes a Graduation function (Martin & White, 2005). Compared with “méi X yào Y” or “méi X qiáng Y”, “yìng” occupies a higher level of evaluative intensity, conveying a stronger sense of stubbornness and critical force. This graduation feature gives the construction a distinct emotional coloring when expressing negative evaluations.

3.3 Variable Features and Semantic Constraints

The semantic correlation between the variable components X and Y is an important condition for the legitimacy of the construction. As noted above, X and Y must be able to form the verb-object phrase “Y+X”. Corpus statistics show that among all 187 valid instances, X and Y form the “Y+X” verb-object combination in 94.6% of cases (177 instances), with only a small number showing marginal usage due to the particularities of internet neologisms. This strong correlation means that the variable components are not arbitrarily combinable but are governed by the deep semantic relationships of Chinese lexical combinations.

In addition, the selection of variable components is also constrained by register style. Corpus data indicate that “méi X yìng Y” primarily appears in informal registers, social media comments (42.3%), short-video titles and comments (31.6%), online news reports (18.7%), and everyday spoken dialogue (7.4%). The construction rarely appears in formal written registers. This register restriction has important implications for L2 teaching.

3.4 Syntactic Functions and Distribution

After analyzing the components of the “méi X yìng Y” construction, we need to examine the overall syntactic functions of the construction to better serve Chinese teaching.

Syntactic Function	Example	Frequency(Percentage)	Analysis
Stand-alone clause	(9) A: He has no talent but insists on performing, and doesn't feel embarrassed even when making a fool of himself. What do you think of his performance? B: Just	41 (21.9%)	This concise language responds to A's question, expressing the speaker's viewpoint and attitude, conveying a sense of helplessness and

Syntactic Function	Example	Frequency(Percentage)	Analysis
Subject	“ <i>méi huó yìng zhěng</i> ” (forcing performance when there is no act).	9 (4.9%)	indifference.
	(10) “ <i>méi lù yìng chuǎng</i> ” (forging ahead when there is no path), as a spirit of courageous exploration, is worth learning for young people.		“ <i>méi lù yìng chuǎng</i> ” as a whole denotes a type of behavior, used nominally as the subject of the sentence.
Predicate	(11) Even if the day’s work is already completed, those who want to perform in front of the boss still engage in “ <i>méi bān yìng jiā</i> ” (forcibly working overtime when there is no work).	96 (51.3%)	Those who want to perform is the agent of the action of working overtime; “ <i>méi bān yìng jiā</i> ” follows the subject as the predicate.
Object	(12) The behavior of over-consuming is precisely “ <i>méi qián yìng huā</i> ”.	26 (13.9%)	“ <i>méi qián yìng huā</i> ” follows the copula verb “ <i>shì</i> ” as the object, explaining the subject “over-consuming”.
Attributive	(13) The heroine in The Way of Success lives a “ <i>méi qián yìng zhuāng</i> ” (forcibly pretending when there is no money) refined life.	15 (8.0%)	“ <i>méi qián yìng zhuāng</i> ” modifies the head noun “life”, highlighting the heroine’s pathological psychology of pursuing luxury despite being financially strapped.

Based on the annotated corpus statistics, the most prominent syntactic function of “*méi X yìng Y*” is as

a predicate (51.3%), followed by stand-alone clauses (21.9%), with the two together accounting for 73.2%. This indicates that the core pragmatic function of the construction is predicative evaluation, that is, accomplishing an evaluation within the statement about someone or something. Stand-alone use reflects the construction's high degree of independence and pragmatic self-sufficiency, frequently appearing in online communication as an evaluative response to a previous topic.

4. Evaluative Semantics and Pragmatic Functions of “*méi X yìng Y*”

4.1 Evaluative Triggering Mechanisms and Features of the Construction

From the perspective of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005), the core function of the “*méi X yìng Y*” construction falls within the Judgment dimension of the Attitude subsystem. Judgment involves ethical evaluations of people's behavior, character, and abilities, among which “Social Esteem” and “Social Sanction” are two important dimensions. The evaluation conveyed by “*méi X yìng Y*” primarily falls within the “Social Sanction” dimension, it judges whether a certain behavior conforms to social norms, is reasonable, and is worthy of affirmation.

The “*méi X yìng Y*” construction analyzed in this paper is a construction expressing evaluative meaning, conveying the speaker's subjective psychological feelings with strong subjective evaluativity. The fixed component “*yìng*” itself is a word with a certain degree of evaluation; the modal verb “*yào*” can replace “*yìng*”, but would lose the emphatic meaning and strong negative emotion. Specifically, the evaluative meaning of this construction is triggered through the following mechanisms. First, constructional coercion through logical contradiction. The construction places “*méi X*” and “*yìng Y*” in the same format, creating a semantic conflict. This conflict itself constitutes an evaluation, it implies that the speaker considers the behavior “illogical”, “irrational”, and “should not happen”. Constructional Coercion gives otherwise neutral or even positive behaviors (such as “*xiǎng fú*” or “*huā qián*”) a negative evaluative coloring once they enter the construction. Second, semantic spillover of “*yìng*”(see Section 3.2 for its formal functions). As an evaluative trigger in this construction, “*yìng*” projects its inherent meaning of “reluctance/stubbornness” onto the entire behavior, shifting the evaluative meaning from implicit to explicit. Third, contextual interactive activation. The specific evaluative orientation of the construction (positive or negative, strong or weak) is not fixed but is activated and adjusted in specific contexts. Contextual factors include: the relationship between the referent and the speaker, the speaker's communicative intent, and the medium and register in which the discourse occurs. In light of the above examples and the contexts in which the construction is predominantly used in online environments, it can be seen that when the speaker evaluates a certain utterance, behavior, or matter of the referent, and when the referent's verbal behavior does not meet the speaker's expectations or logical facts, the speaker uses “*méi X yìng Y*” in expressing positive or negative evaluations.

Previous research has often simplified the evaluative meaning of “*méi X yìng Y*” to “negative evaluation”, but corpus analysis shows this judgment to be too crude. In fact, the evaluative meaning of

this construction is not unidimensional but presents an attitudinal continuum from strongly negative to positive. Based on corpus annotation, this continuum can be divided into four typical levels:

Evaluation Type	Typical Example	Attitudinal Intensity	Pragmatic Features	Corpus Proportion
Criticism/Condemnation	“ <i>méi kǔ yìng chī</i> ” (having fortune but not enjoying it)	Strongly negative	Direct criticism, clear stance	38.5%
Ridicule/Mockery	“ <i>méi qián yìng huā</i> ” (pretending to be rich while poor)	Moderately negative	Social banter, half-serious half-joking	34.8%
Helplessness/Regret	“ <i>méi ài yìng tán</i> ” (settling for marriage without love)	Weakly negative	Expressing sympathy or helplessness	13.9%
Affirmation/Praise	“ <i>méi lù yìng chuǎng</i> ” (ultimately achieving success)	Positive	Commending courage and perseverance	12.8%

The criticism/condemnation type is the core and most frequent evaluative type. In example (1), “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” creates illness when there is none, and stubbornly endures illness when there is one, the speaker uses it to criticize the older generation for stubbornly adhering to an overly frugal lifestyle even after living conditions have improved. This criticism is built on the logical contradiction of having the conditions but not enjoying them, with a clear and strong evaluative stance. The ridicule/mockery type is particularly common on social media. In example (5), “*méi qián yìng huā*” describes young people maintaining a pseudo-refined lifestyle through borrowing. The speaker does not engage in severe moral condemnation but conveys disapproval in a lighthearted, humorous tone. This social banter reflects a typical feature of internet language expressing critical attitudes without direct offense. The helplessness/regret type has lower evaluative intensity, with the speaker often sympathizing with the referent’s situation. Example (6), “*méi ài yìng tán*” describes the behavior of reluctantly entering

marriage to escape single anxiety or conform to social pressure, where the speaker's attitude is more one of regret than criticism. The affirmation/praise type, though accounting for the smallest proportion, demonstrates that this construction is not inherently negative. In example (10), "*méi lù yìng chuǎng*" evaluates the spirit of not retreating in the face of adversity and daring to explore. The stubbornness meaning of "*yìng*" shifts from negative to positive, being stubborn about the right things is precisely perseverance.

Through analysis, we can also conclude that the shift in evaluation type is regulated by three main factors: (1) contextual elements, the outcome of the behavior (success/failure) and the legitimacy of the purpose of "*yìng Y*"; (2) collocational elements, co-occurrence with positive words such as "*yǒng qì*" (courage) and "*jīng shén*" (spirit) inclines the construction toward the positive, while co-occurrence with negative words such as "*zì tǎo kǔ chī*" (asking for trouble) and "*xū wěi*" (hypocrisy) inclines it toward the negative; and (3) register elements, news reports and formal commentary tend to use the positive or strongly negative senses, while social media tends toward the ridiculing and mocking sense.

4.2 Intersubjectivity of the Construction

The "*méi X yìng Y*" construction is not merely a one-way evaluation by the speaker toward the referent; it also embodies intersubjectivity, the speaker, while expressing their own stance, simultaneously guides the listener to accept their evaluative perspective. This manifests in three specific ways: (1) Stance alignment by using this construction, the speaker implies that they share the same values and judgment criteria with the listener ("You also think this is unreasonable, don't you?"); (2) Evaluation escalation, in online communication, "*méi X yìng Y*" often appears in the form of topic hashtags (e.g., #"*méi kǔ yìng chī*"#), elevating individual evaluation to collective resonance and forming an aggregative effect of public evaluation; (3) Identity construction, speakers who use this construction typically construct a discursive identity as a rational observer or critic of social phenomena, and this identity recognition in turn reinforces the motivation for using the construction.

The intersubjectivity feature has important implications for L2 teaching: learners need to understand not only the literal meaning of the construction but also the social-interactive functions behind it: when, where, and with whom to use the construction to achieve the intended communicative effect. Taking the Weibo topic "*méi kǔ yìng chī*" as an example, under this topic a large number of users not only post their own observations ("My mom is exactly like this, she only eats fruit after it's gone bad") but also echo each other in the comments ("Same in my family", "Moms are the same all over the world"). Through this interaction, individual evaluations are amplified into collective value judgments. "*méi kǔ yìng chī*" no longer merely describes a certain phenomenon but constructs a collective narrative of intergenerational value conflict. In this process, the speaker both expresses their own stance and strengthens the legitimacy of that stance by seeking resonance.

5. Teaching the "*méi X yìng Y*" Construction

The rapid development of the internet has nurtured the flourishing of internet culture, and internet

words, as carriers of this culture, have emerged one after another. These internet words are concise, fashionable, and distinctive, emerging as a new form of language and being widely used in people's daily lives, representing the most active part of contemporary Chinese. Chinese language teaching should not only teach learners static, "dead" language; it should also take into account the multiple impacts that internet words, due to their unique characteristics, have on international students' Chinese learning, daily communication, and understanding of Chinese culture. As Chinese language teachers, we should incorporate internet words with vitality and creativity into regular teaching to achieve the fundamental goal of international Chinese language education, cultivating learners' ability to use Chinese for communication.

5.1 Pedagogical Positioning and Difficulty Analysis

Regarding how to teach the construction "*méi X yìng Y*", it is first necessary to clarify its pedagogical positioning. Based on the construction's register features (informal, internet-based, colloquial) and semantic complexity (evaluative continuum), this paper recommends positioning it as teaching content for the intermediate to advanced level (HSK Level 5 and above) in spoken/internet registers. It is suitable for introduction as part of a "Contemporary Chinese Neologisms" module in cultural topics courses, advanced spoken Chinese courses, or internet Chinese courses, and should not be incorporated into beginner-level core grammar teaching.

From the perspective of second language acquisition, the teaching difficulties of this construction are concentrated in several areas. First, the non-compositionality of the construction as a whole. When learners first encounter "*méi X yìng Y*", they tend to interpret it word-by-word according to its components, "*méi kǔ yìng chī*" is understood as "there is no hardship, but one forces oneself to eat", failing to accurately grasp its evaluative meaning of "excessive frugality and inappropriateness". This indicates that learners need to holistically acquire the constructional meaning of the format rather than simply adding up its components. Second, the patterns and constraints on variable substitution. Although the construction is productive, not all combinations of "*méi+noun/adjective+yìng+verb*" are acceptable. For example, "*méi fàn yìng chī*" is formally grammatical but rarely appears in actual use, because "*chī fàn*" (eating a meal) does not presuppose any specific condition and cannot trigger the unreasonable evaluative semantics. Learners need to understand the semantic presupposition mechanisms behind variable combinations. Third, the contextual sensitivity of the evaluative meaning. As previously discussed, the same construction can express different attitudes, criticism, ridicule, helplessness, praise in different contexts. If learners only grasp the basic semantics of the construction without contextual judgment skills, they may misuse it in serious situations (causing offense) or fail to convey sincerity when expressing praise. Fourth, the cultural contextual gap. The reason why "*méi kǔ yìng chī*" became an internet hotspot is closely related to deep-seated cultural backgrounds unique to Chinese society, such as intergenerational value differences, transformations in consumption concepts, and contrasts between urban and rural lifestyles. For learners to truly understand this construction,

linguistic explanation alone is insufficient; they also need to develop some awareness of the cultural context of contemporary Chinese society.

5.2 A Four-Step Approach Based on *Sān-Yī Yǔfǎ*

This paper, based on the *Sān-Yī Yǔfǎ* (Form-Function-Context) approach proposed by Shi(2016), advocates that construction teaching should achieve an integrated three-dimensional interactive teaching model of Form function and context, systematically analyzing the structural features, semantic connotations, and usage norms of the construction to build interactive language practice scenarios. Based on this concept, combined with the acquisition difficulties of this construction, a “four-step teaching pathway” has been designed.

The core goal of language teaching is to enhance students’ communicative competence. For Chinese language teaching, the fundamental purpose is to help international students achieve accurate understanding and appropriate use of Chinese. When teaching the “*méi X yìng Y*” construction, teachers should adhere to the learner-centered principle and, through multi-dimensional interaction mechanisms between teacher and students and among students, achieve the internalization and transfer of knowledge under the teacher’s guidance. The first step is to enable learners to recognize the formal features of “*méi X yìng Y*” and perceive the relationship between the fixed and variable components.

Teaching activities for this step include:

- (1) Present 8–10 typical examples of “*méi X yìng Y*”, annotate the fixed components “*méi*” and “*yìng*”, and ask students to circle the variable components X and Y.
 - (2) Guide students to observe the pattern: X is usually a noun/adjective (an object or a state), and Y is a verb (an action).
 - (3) Complete matching exercises: Provide several X and Y options and have students combine them into legitimate “*méi X yìng Y*” formats, explaining what word Y+X can form (e.g., “*kǔ*” → “*chī kǔ*”).
- The goal of this stage is to establish learners’ formal schema, being able to recognize the “*méi X yìng Y*” format at a glance and distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate variable combinations.

The next stage transitions to helping learners understand the holistic meaning of the construction, evaluating “doing something forcibly without having the conditions”.

Teaching activities for this stage include:

- (1) Present contrastive pairs to help students discover that constructional meaning $\neq$ sum of component meanings:
“*Tā xiǎng fú le*” (He is enjoying fortune) in neutral description vs. “*Tā méi fú yìng xiǎng*” in negative evaluation
“*Tā jiàn shēn*” (He works out) in neutral description vs. “*Tā méi jī yìng liàn.*” in ridiculing evaluation
- (2) Guide students to conclude: this format does not just say “*méi X yìng Y*”, but evaluates an unreasonable behavior.

(3) Use fill-in-the-blank interpretation exercises to reinforce: Ask students to explain in their own words what “*méi qián yìng huā*” means “This person ____ (does not have enough money), but ____ (forcibly spends a lot of money). This is very ____ (unreasonable/irrational)”.

The core of this stage is to help learners overcome the barrier of “literal understanding” and enter the level of “evaluative meaning comprehension”.

Paying attention to usage explanation in construction teaching allows Chinese learners to understand in what situations to use the construction and what issues to pay attention to when using it. For example, since the “*méi X yìng Y*” construction has both positive praising meaning and negative evaluative meaning, helping international students understand the praising meaning requires combining it with the specific usage of “*méi X yìng Y*” in communication. This enables learners to judge the specific evaluation type (criticism/ridicule/helplessness/affirmation) according to the context.

Teaching activities:

(1) Present three short video clips or dialogue texts from different contexts, each containing “*méi X yìng Y*” but with different evaluative attitudes:

Context A (criticism): Elderly people have air conditioning but don’t use it, relying on fans to cool down on hot days. Comment: “*méi fú yìng xiǎng*”.

Context B (ridicule): A colleague earning 3,000 yuan a month carries an LV bag. Comment: “*méi qián yìng huā*”.

Context C (affirmation): A startup founder goes from scratch to IPO. Comment: “*méi lù yìng chuǎng*”, truly remarkable.”

(2) Group discussion: How are these three instances of “*méi X yìng Y*” different? Is the speaker’s attitude angry, amused, or admiring?

(3) The teacher summarizes the evaluation continuum and guides students to understand that the same construction can express different attitudes; the key lies in contextual cues (modal particles, co-text, relationship between speaker and hearer).

This stage is the difficulty and focus of teaching, it cultivates not mechanical memorization but contextual sensitivity.

The combination of meaning and usage can enable learners to grasp the meaning and usage of the construction. However, knowing “what it is” and “what it is used for” does not necessarily mean Chinese learners know in what contexts to use it. Establishing typical contexts can solve the problem of “where to use it”, enabling Chinese learners to actually use the construction. For the “*méi X yìng Y*” construction, based on its two levels of constructional meaning, two typical contexts can be established in teaching: expressing praise toward the other person, for example, You should learn from his attitude of “*méi lù yìng chuǎng*”; or expressing a negative attitude, for example, Exposing yourself to the scorching sun just to pick up two bottles is simply *méi kǔ yìng chī*.” Integrating the establishment of typical contexts into construction teaching enables Chinese learners to intuitively perceive typical scenarios of construction usage and accurately grasp the meaning and usage of the construction. The

teaching objective is to enable learners to appropriately use “*méi X yìng Y*” to express their evaluative stance in real or semi-real communicative situations.

Teaching activities:

(1) Situational simulation: Present the following communicative scenarios and ask students to respond using “*méi X yìng Y*”:

Scenario 1: Your friend, despite being financially strained, buys the latest smartphone for the sake of face. How would you evaluate this? (→ “*méi qián yìng huā*”)

Scenario 2: You see a report about a 70-year-old who gets up at 4 a.m. every day to exercise, rain or shine. How would you evaluate this? (→ Could be positive: “*méi lǎn yìng qín*”; or depends on your attitude)

(2) Task-based production: In small groups, observe and record a “*méi X yìng Y*” phenomenon in your surroundings (from the internet or from daily life), describe it using the format, explain your attitude, and present it to the class.

(3) Metacognitive reflection: Ask students to think that does your native language have a similar construction? What strategies does your native language use to express similar attitudes? Cross-linguistic comparison can deepen understanding.

5.3 Teaching Precautions

In teaching practice, the following points deserve special attention:

First, register awareness. Teachers should clearly point out to learners that “*méi X yìng Y*” is primarily used in informal settings (social media, conversations with friends, online comments) and is inappropriate in formal settings (academic presentations, job interviews, official documents). This warning is crucial for preventing register misuse.

Second, cultural background preparation. Typical examples such as “*méi kǔ yìng chī*” involve deep-level cultural factors of Chinese society, including intergenerational value differences, changes in consumption concepts, and contrasts between urban and rural lifestyles. Teaching should be supplemented with appropriate background knowledge (such as China’s transformation from material scarcity to relative affluence, the influence of the older generation’s life memories on the younger generation’s values) to help learners not only learn “how to say it” but also understand “why it is said this way”.

Third, pragmatic risks of negative evaluation. As noted above, this construction is primarily used to express criticism or mockery. Learners should be reminded that using the construction with people they are not familiar with or with elders may cause offense. In teaching, this pragmatic awareness can be reinforced through “appropriate/inappropriate” scenario judgment exercises.

6. Conclusion

This paper takes the internet-popular construction “*méi X yìng Y*” as its research object, analyzing its formal features, component functions, and syntactic distribution within the theoretical framework of

Construction Grammar. On this basis, it introduces Appraisal Theory to reveal the nature of its evaluative semantics and its continuum features. It provides a new analytical path for the study of internet-popular constructions while offering specific and operable teaching plans for internet language instruction in L2 Chinese teaching. The limitations of the study are: the corpus size is limited, and diachronic comparisons of the construction's usage across different platforms and time periods have not yet been conducted; the effectiveness of the teaching plans awaits empirical validation. Future research could expand the corpus and conduct longitudinal tracking studies to explore the developmental patterns of learners' acquisition outcomes after exposure to this construction. Socio-linguistic perspectives could also be adopted to examine usage differences across different social groups and the construction's evolutionary trends.

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