

Analysis of the Chinese Construction “ban A ban B”

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Abstract: Taking the concept of inheritance in Construction Grammar as departure, this paper considers that “ban A and ban B” (ban means half in English) is a sub-construction under the category of intermediate construction, and its meaning is the observance and partial deviation of the prototype construction. As variables participating in the integration of construction meaning, the relation between A and B determines the meaning of the whole construction. If A and B is in opposite or relative relation, the construction takes neutral meaning. If A and B is related, under the effect of construction coercion, the construction also takes neutral meaning since the relation between A and B is changed into opposite. If A and B is in absolutely opposite relation, then the construction meaning will be selectively biased towards A or B in the specific context. At the level of integration degree, “half A half B” presents three levels, i.e. low, medium and high.

1. Introduction

The concept of construction was first proposed by Goldberg (1995:4), who defined construction in this way:

C is a CONSTRUCTION iff_{def} C is a form-meaning pair $\langle Fi, Si \rangle$ such that some aspect of Fi or some aspect of Si is not strictly predictable from C’s component parts or from other previously established constructions.

Goldberg (2006:5) further revised the definition of construction as:

Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency.

Construction Grammar (CxG) regards language as a network system composed of constructions. Different constructions correspond to different nodes in the network, and those constructions are connected through inheritance relationships.

For instance, the English SAI (subject-auxiliary verb inversion construction) construction category has a variety of discourse expressions, and its sub-constructions include nine categories: (Non-subject) Wh-questions, Y/N questions, Initial negative adverbs, Counterfactual conditionals, Exclamative, Wishes/Curses, Negative conjunct, Comparatives, Positive rejoinder. Examples are as follows:

Table 1 English SAI construction category

Subparts of SAI construction	Examples
(Non-subject) Wh-questions	Where did she go?
Y/N questions	Did she go?
Initial negative adverbs	Seldom had she gone there...
Counterfactual conditionals	Had she gone, they would be here by now.
Exclamative	Boy did she go!
Wishes/Curses	May a million fleas infest his armpits!
Negative conjunct	Neither do they vote.
Comparatives	He was faster at it than was she.
Positive rejoinder	So does she.

A major and common feature of these sub-constructions is the non-positive pragmatic meaning. The English SAI construction is equivalent to the category of a SAI construct formed by the core "prototype" radiating in different directions. Here, the function of the construction determines its syntactic form, and the non-negative pragmatic meaning corresponds to the form, which represents the inversion of the subject and auxiliary verbs. The core "prototype sentences" have various shared functions (including semantic, pragmatic and cognitive functions), while the lower sub-constructions that are radiated out have different but extended functions previously defined by the shared function. In other words, the extended function is actually the extension and development realized on the basis of the shared function, which reflects an inheritance view from the perspective of construction grammar.

Inspired by this idea, we find that there is an inheritance relationship of polysemy links between such three constructions, i.e. "ban A ban B" "ban A bu B" "bu A bu B" and its upper intermediate construction.

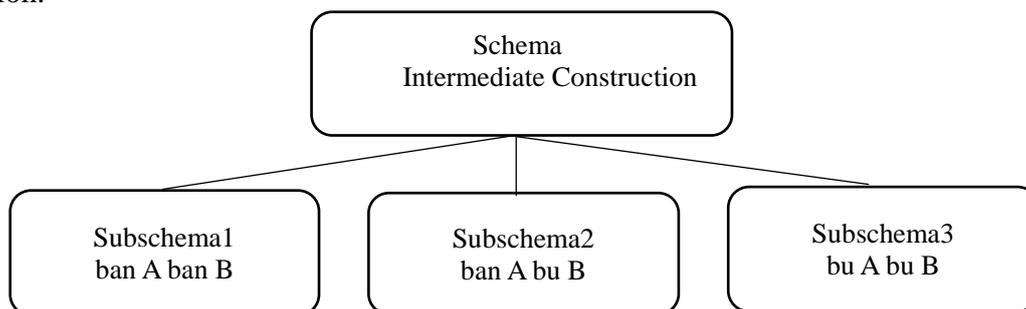


Figure 1. Upper intermediate construction and its sub constructions

We hold that "banA ban B", "ban A bu B" and "bu A bu B" are three sub-constructions under the category of intermediate construction, all of which have neutral and moderate meanings. However, the meaning and function of the above three constructions are extended and expanded on the basis of the prototype function (shared function) in contexts. The semantic representation is the compliance and partial deviation of the prototype construction and the function is realized as the difference but also a cross-functional division.



Figure 2. Prototype meaning of construction "(ban/bu) A (ban/bu)B"

As shown in the figure, A and B respectively represent two parameters in the "(ban/bu) A (ban/bu) B" construction, and a continuum or semantic field is formed between A and B, indicating opposite or relative ends. The dotted square brackets indicate that the "(ban/bu) A (ban/bu) B" construction is not the absolute intermediate point between A and B, but is floating at both ends. It is relative, which means sometimes biased towards A and sometimes biased towards B. This paper takes "ban A ban B" as the starting point to explore the inheritance and development relationship between the upper construction and its sub-constructions.

2. Lexical Entry and the Deviation of Construction Meaning

There are three types of A and B that can enter the "ban A ban B" construction. The semantic relationship between them can be divided into three categories: related, relative and opposite.

(1) a. When he came in, he fell down on the sofa *half-sitting and half-lying* without saying a word.

b. There is a *half-poetry and half-prose* literary style in French medieval literature called “la chantefable”.

(2) a. Some of the languages of the old translations are *half-literary and half-vernacular*, while others are of a translating nature. From this factor, retranslation is a good thing.

b. Only to find that he carried the camera and said in *half-bad and half-good* Chinese, “I am doing this!”(which means he is here to take photographs)

(3) a. He dressed up, wore a trench coat, erected his collar, and hid half of the face of the blue-faced fangs. Also on the head was a straw hat with the cap pressed to the eyes. Despite this, he was still a *half-man and half-ghost*. He stood in front of the mirror in the closet for a few minutes. His eyes were cold, just like pulling a gun to knock down the ugly man in the mirror.

b. He must be steadfastly claiming that he has lived well from the beginning to the end, and there is absolutely no *half-life and half-death* state.

In the case of (1), “half-sitting and half-lying”, “sitting” and “lying” are related behavioral actions, and there is also some similarity between “poetry” and “prose”. The meaning of the construction “ban A and ban B” is that the similarities are for the time being, and the differences are taken separately as “half”. In the case of (2), “literary” and “vernacular”, and “good” and “bad” are relative antonyms. In the case of (3), “man” and “ghost”, “life” and “death” are absolute antonyms. The situation of “half-dead and half-life” and “half-man and half-ghost” will never occur. Therefore, this extremely impossible situation also implies a strong derogatory meaning in most cases.

We deem that when A and B are opposite or relative, A and B then enter the construction “ban A and ban B” as variables. Based on this, there will be interaction and coordination between lexicon and construction. Results are as follows: When A and B are opposite, the construction will naturally take the intermediate meaning, but semantically “half A” and “half B” are not completely equivalent. For example, (2b) is semantically biased towards the former, i.e. “sheng” (bad), which means one is unskilled in Mandarin. (2a) emphasizes on “literary”, which is mainly compatible with the carrier of the translation. When A and B are related, due to construction coercion, A and B will also have relative properties in this construction, and therefore represent intermediate meaning. When A and B are completely opposite, “half A” and “half B” cannot coexist completely at the same time, then they are at the “critical point” position. We also regard it as an intermediate state, i.e. the intersection of “half A” and “half B” is \emptyset (empty set). But in the actual communicative context, the meaning will tend to be biased semantically. For example, (3a) is semantically biased towards “ghost” and (3b) “death”.

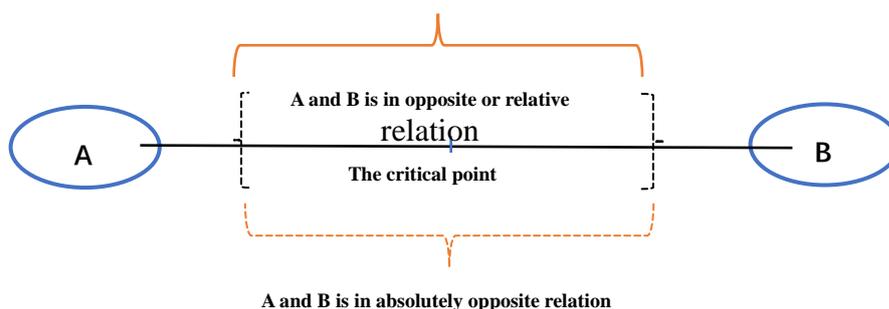


Figure 3. Lexical entry and the meaning deviation of “ban A and ban B”

Figure 3 shows that when A and B are opposite, on the basis of lexical entry, A and B exhibit opposite relations under construction coercion. Therefore, the construction “ban A and ban B” represents the meaning in the intermediate state between A and B. When A and B are absolute antonyms, “half A” and “half B” cannot be co-occurred in principle, thus showing a “critical point” state. However, it will appear to be offset towards both “A” and “B” directions in specific context. Therefore, the difference is shown in the figure by a broken line.

3. Integration Degree

Conceptual integration (or blending) was proposed by Fauconnier & Turner in the 1990s on the basis of mental space. The theory holds that two concepts are not simply added together, but rather generate new meaning representations after integration. Following the theory of Construction Grammar, the relation between components is by no means the simple addition. The exact meaning as well as functional meaning of the construction cannot be accurately predicted syntactically, but representing as the “emergent meaning” formed by conceptual integration. Wu (2016:24) believes that “the integration effect of language components depends on two factors, one is the integrated 'framework' and the other is the input 'elements', i.e. language components involved in integration. Thus, these elements generate the integration effect and emerge the new meaning (emergent meaning) under the operation of 'framework'.”

Zhang & Wang (2003) holds that words that are the elements of integration participate in the integration in the form of meaning units, so the consequent results are hierarchical. If the elements of integration are involved in integration in the original or basic sense, then it is a relatively low-level integration. If the elements involved in integration are on original or basic meaning, then it is a relatively lower kind of integration. But if words in the integration are based on extension meaning (including metaphorical and metonymic meanings), then it is a relatively higher level of integration. Wu (2016) considers that the hierarchy of integration results should not only be based on semantic analysis, but also evidence of syntactic representation. It is therefore, based on the above viewpoints, that this paper proposes the semantic and syntactic criteria for judging the hierarchy of a construction integration. Among them, the semantic factors are the main and the syntactic factors are only as supplementation. The interpretation is as follows.

Semantically: whether the elements in integration are in their basic or extended meaning, and whether the result of integration has the appearance of “emergent meaning”;

Syntactically: the cohesiveness of a construction, such as whether the lexicon or word order is fixed.

Here are some specific examples.

3.1 Constructions with Low Level of Integration

This level of "half A half B" is integrated on basic meaning, having temporary and loose structure. It can be reordered with strong generation ability, such as:

half-sand half-stone, half-ash half-brick, half-poetry half prose, half-red half-green

half-dry and half-wet, half-sitting half-laying, half-male half-female, half-drunk half-infatuated

3.2 Constructions with Intermediate Level of Integration

Compared with the low level, the intermediate level of “half A and half B” has higher degree of integration, and also has corresponding emergent meaning. In a certain context, the corresponding emotional color meaning will be presented. The structure of this kind is relatively fixed and thus cannot be freely ordered. Such as:

Half-salty half-light, half-working half-reading, half-heart half-feeling, half-yin half-yang, half-official half-civilian

Half-man half-god, half-man half-ghost, half-teacher half-friend, half-fresh half-ripe, half-male half-female

3.3 Constructions with High Level of Integration

This type of "half A and half B" has the highest degree of integration, and the construction meaning can no longer be accurately predicted in the literal sense. It often has a specific meaning and is thus included in the dictionary as an idiom.

Half-trusting half-doubting, half-pushing half-accepting, half-swallowing half-spiting

4. Conclusion

This paper concludes that "ban A ban B", "ban A bu B", "bu A bu B" are the three

sub-constructions under the intermediate construction. On this basis, we focus on the lexical entry and the compliance as well as the deviation of the prototype construction of “half A half B” in the specific context. If A and B is in opposite or relative relation, the construction takes neutral meaning. If A and B is related, under the effect of construction coercion, the construction also takes neutral meaning since the relation between A and B is changed into opposite. If A and B is in absolutely opposite relation, then the construction meaning will be selectively biased towards A or B in the specific context. At the level of integration degree, “half A half B” presents three levels, i.e. low, medium and high. In conclusion, the lower the degree of integration, the higher the schematicity, the stronger the productivity, but the lower the compositionality.

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