

Semantic Grammaticalization in the Construction “N₁ you V guo N₂” from Neo-Cognitive Pragmatic Perspective

Qihong Xing

School of Foreign Studies, Hunan University of Science and Technology, Xiangtan, China

Email: nancy0914@yeah.net

How to cite this paper: Xing, Q. H. (2018). Semantic Grammaticalization in the Construction “N₁ you V guo N₂” from Neo-Cognitive Pragmatic Perspective. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 8, 221-230.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2018.86019>

Received: January 11, 2016

Accepted: December 10, 2018

Published: December 13, 2018

Copyright © 2018 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

The construction “N₁ you V guo N₂” pervasively visible in China has demonstrated its typical cog-pragmatic features. It is pointed out that “you” and “guo” in this construction are the results of notional verbs’ grammaticalization. Grammatical features and cognitive motivation of it have been discussed based on the project theory and de-categorization theory. In its grammaticalization and pragmaticalization process the pragmatic markers contribute the most. Considering the integrated meaning from social, pragmatic and cognitive perspectives, it is found that the construction is out of the speaker’s particular intention, also the results of pragmaticalization.

Keywords

N₁ you V guo N₂, Semantic Grammaticalization, Pragmaticalization, Pragmatic Marker

1. Introduction

Grammaticalization has been the focus topic of linguistics for many years till now. “N₁ you V guo N₂” is a construction with connection between construction and grammaticalization, first appeared in southeastern coastal cities in China and then radiated to the mainland. Data have been collected from three sources: CCRL, previous studies and typical TV programs. Previous studies on the resemble constructions like “you VP” always focused its attention on the verb phrase. However, its typical cog-pragmatic features could not be neglected. First, the tense markers “you” and “guo” have added its complexity at the syntactic level. What even more important is, there is a semantic gradient process.

Neo-Cognitive Pragmatics refers to a trend that Pragmatics should change to

cognition and social factors, which is also an important direction of Pragmatics in 21 century (Wang, 2013: p. 1). Thus, its integrated meaning with the two perplex words will be analyzed from such a perspective and its analysis should take into account some cognitive and social factors. This paper aims to clarify its typical cog-pragmatic features and explore its meaning-shift mechanism in the semanticalization and pragmaticalization processes.

2. Semantic Grammaticalization of “N₁ you V guo N₂” from Neo-Cognitive Pragmatic Perspective

2.1. Pragmatic Attributes of Grammaticalization

Grammaticalization was first proposed by Millet (1912), which is described as “the role of a word change to grammatical element”. In general, there are three types of grammaticalization: grammaticalization, sententialization, and lexicalization. The first type is the radical one and the second type begins from its pragmatic factors initially conventional then to grammatical factors. Bisang et al. (2004) pointed that the core part of grammaticalization is the changes of word morpheme and syntactic features, meaning and function. Its meaning change is based on the word categories, which is inter-related to pragmatics, lexicography and phonology. Grammaticalization can be studied from synchronic and diachronic perspectives. When studied synchronically, grammaticalization is regarded as a kind of pragmatic phenomenon, which is also a way to express kinds of grammatical relations.

Hopper & Traugott (1993) held that some pragmatic theories can provide motivation for grammaticalization. Pragmatic inference contributes a lot in grammaticalization in that pragmatic inference includes metaphor and metonymy mechanism, which can trigger the process of grammaticalization. Bisang et al. (2004) also emphasized the importance of pragmatic inference. Certainly, some Chinese linguistic expressions, whose tense features are related to some particular markers, are also promoted by pragmatic inference. In China, there are also some scholars who are interested in grammaticalization, such as Sun (1994) and Wen (2001), etc. Construction to a great extent will be influenced by grammaticalization. Besides, Erman & Kotsinas proposed the concept “pragmaticalization”, which provoked many researches on the pragmatic attributes of discourse markers. Hyman (1984) even regards grammaticalization as the convention of pragmatical features (Hou, 2008). In a word, grammaticalization, pragmaticalization have laid great effect on the construction producing and understanding.

2.2. Grammaticalization of “you” and “guo” in the Construction

2.2.1. “N₁ you V guo N₂” Construction

“N₁ you V guo N₂” originates from ordinary language and has experienced diachronic changes. It has its particular features as a complex construction. Many researchers have studied “you/youmeiyu/meiyu VP” constructions from cognitive perspective or pragmatic perspective, such as Dong (2004), Wang et al.

(2006), Shi (2004), Hou (2007), Zheng (2009, 2010) and Chen & Wang (2010). Their studies have proved the importance or research values of this construction. Some of them hold the view that the English perfect tense is related to this construction in a sense. The particle word “you” has been studied quite less than the verb phrases. The construction “N₁ you V guo N₂” is regarded as the derivation of the “you/you meiyou/meiyou VP” construction. Taking the tense marker “guo” into consideration, though complexity of the construction is raised, they still have something in common.

1) A: ni you meiyou kan dianying?

you have no watch movie

Have you seen the movie?

B: wo you kan guo dianying¹

2) wo haoxiang you ting guo zhege shi!²

me seem have hear this thing

I seem to have heard this thing!³

According to Zheng (2010), all the physical verbs can be the objects of “you” to form a “you + VP” construction. This object can also be followed by an adverbial, another object, adverbial with a object, a compliment, and a compliment with an object. The answer from B in 1) “wo you kan guo dianying” is just an example of “you” followed by a compliment to form a “Subject + you + VP + compliment” construction. Put differently, “kan” is the object of “you”, “dianying” is the object of “kan”, and the whole “kan dianying” is the just the compliment of “wo you”. The whole answer can be short for just only two words “wo you”. However, the tense marker “guo” here slightly change the structure of the construction. “kan guo dianying” refers to the event that has happened in the past. It has experienced the inflection change. Analysis of 2) is same to 1). It is also a “subject + you + VP + compliment” construction. The verb “ting” is the object of “you”, “zhege shi” is the object of “ting” and the whole phrase “ting guo zhege shi (heard this)” is the compliment of “wo you (I have)”. “guo” is just a tense marker. Zhu (1981) always mentioned the importance of long object. Evidently, the examples happen to have long objects. Therefore, the “N₁ you V guo N₂” construction can be equal to the structure “subject + you + VP + compliment (V + inf-ed + (N)P)”.

2.2.2. Previous studies on “you” and “guo” in the Construction

Yuan Boqi in Yuan dynasty once said, “Today’s grammaticalized words, Yesterday’s notional words”. “you” and “guo” experienced changes synchronically and diachronically. “you” has its original function as an existential verb expressing ownership. Yuan et al. (2009) also has a hot debate on the category membership of “you” including verb, prep, auxiliary word, and affix. Chen (2004) discussed the distinction of existential verb “you”. Xue & Yan (2011) and Zhao (2013) respectively held that “you” are the subjective expressing affix and discourse

¹Chosen from Chen (2010).

²Chosen from the TV Serie *Band-aid of Love*.

³Examples in this paper will be the literal translation for the accordance with the construction.

marker from the Prototype theory and Categorization theory. Besides, [Chen \(2011\)](#) holds that “you” can be the adjective prefix, noun prefix, or be used before monosyllable verb. Besides, “you” can be a light verb with no function but easy for hearing. In general, all these prove its identity difficulty and most “you + VP” constructions express human’s actions.

Quite like “you”, “guo” also used to be a motion verb “jing guo (pass by)”. Then, synchronically it has been grammaticalized as the tense marker which means “something has happened”. Or it can also be regarded as an auxiliary verb. It can be classified into two types by [Chen \(2011\)](#). For a constructional approach, the second type “guo” attracts most attention, which means the past things or the past experiences. Besides, according to [Zhong \(2013\)](#), “guo” has semantically changed from special category to quantity category to chronic category, syntactically experienced from predicate focus to modifier, from compliment element to auxiliary verb. In Chinese, there are three words to express its changing process: “jing guo” “du guo” and “chao guo”, which is just the procedure of “guo”’s grammaticalization.

2.3. De-Grammaticalization Analyses and Cognitive Mapping Mechanism of “N₁ you V guo N₂”

[Wang \(2006: pp. 114, 120\)](#) held that grammaticalization is based on human’s cognitive ability, which is closely related to mind and subjectivity. The trend from notional to grammatical is the focus. It is commonly believed that grammaticalization means the change from notion one to functional one. Then, Categorization is one kind of cognitive abilities of human kind. It is the way to know the world. De-grammaticalization theory is used to explain the dynamic features of word categories. [Fang \(2005\)](#) denotes that de-grammaticalization has three main features: whose premises are semantic generalization or abstraction; syntactically has lost the category’s typical distributive features while receive new features of new categories; in terms of the discourse function it has been changed. “guo” is a tense marker and also a dynamic marker, which mainly refers to the grammaticalized grammar marker words, like “le”. Besides, “guo” and “you” has some relations in terms of tense when it is closely related to the English perfect tense. De-grammaticalization is the starting point of categorization. De-grammaticalization can be analyzed from the levels of language changes. In this way de-grammaticalization can be defined as “the process of a certain member of the category from its typical features’ losing to its new features’ gaining”. It is a creative thinking way. Verb-noun nominalization is the typical de-grammaticalization phenomenon. “N₁ you V guo N₂” construction has just experienced the process from categorization to de-grammaticalization. This is out of the language user or speaker’s particular intention, which is determined by the verb’s internal attributes. Meanwhile, in terms of its cognitive mechanism, the construction has expanded the word’s meaning through metonymy and changed its category.

Taylor (1996: p. 342) still made a detailed description about the grammaticalization of the English word “have”. He held that the word “have” has changed from the existential verb to grammatical marker. There are also some other scholars who wrote papers on difference or similarities between the English “have” and the Chinese “you”. In the following examples we can get the conclusion that “have” is half grammaticalized.

3) Do you have a bank account?

4) The guests have arrived.

Dating back to “N₁ you V guo N₂” construction, the “you” in the construction owns partial meaning of the notional verb and has low relevance. (Wang et al., 2006: pp. 129-130, 136) From the mapping view in cognitive linguistics, grammaticalization is also a process from one cognitive domain to another domain. The English perfect tense is regarded as a cognitive model in the mapping continuum and the “N₁ you V guo N₂” construction is the target domain. Actually, there is no perfect tense in Chinese. The two cognitive domains are the English “have done” and the other one is the “you + VP” construction. This construction is out of pragmatic efforts by changing his cognition style. For those who know English perfect tense, especially for English learners with the knowledge background, such a construction can activate our cognitive world about this. However, for those who do not know anything about this construction, this can be a novel expression and has particular effects. People are often fond of novel expressions. “N₁ you V guo N₂” on one hand may be mapped from the meta-construction “you VP”; on the other hand, it may be mapped from the past tense with the auxiliary verb “guo”. In a word, this construction has experienced the process of cognitive mapping. In this way it suited the trend for Neo-Cognitive Pragmatics.

2.4. “N₁ you V guo N₂” from Cognitive-Pragmatic Perspective

2.4.1. Social Background and Pragmatic Attributes of “N₁ you V guo N₂”

The origination of the “N₁ you V guo N₂” construction roots in social background and it has been synchronically influenced by some pragmatic and social factors. Hou (2013) proposed the question: is “you meiyou + VP” construction influenced by the southern Chinese dialects? The answer is affirmative and he answered “you shou dao yingxiang” with the “you VP” construction. This is a marked answer. If we use the unmarked answer, we should say “shou dao/guo (south dialect) yingxiang”. That is because Mandarin Chinese has been used most. This kind of phenomenon also proved that “you” and “guo” “le” has some relations in terms of tense, that is, there exists tense relation. They differ a little in meaning. By illustration of the following two examples from the TV series, a detailed comparison between these two types of answer has been made.

5) (*Mandarin Chinese*)

A1: ni chifan le mei(you)?

you eat yes or no

Have you had your meals?

A2: ni you meiyou chifan?

you have no eat

Have you had your meals?

B: wo chi guo le.

Me eat

I have.

6) (“ N_1 you V guo N_2 ”)

C1: ni you chi guo fan ma?

you have eat rice

Have you had your breakfast/lunch/supper?

C2: ni you meiyou chifan?

you have no have supper

Have you had your breakfast/lunch/supper?

D: wo you chi.

me have eat

Yes, I have.

It is easy to find that the question styles are quite alike. Both A1 and C2 can be used while Mandarin Chinese tend to use A1 (VP le meiyou?), “ N_1 you V guo N_2 ” construction users tend to use C1 (you V guo NP?). However, their answers are quite different. Both the two answers mean that something has happened. However, from cognitive and pragmatic strategies’ perspective, the answer from B not only expresses the past thing but also a polite refusal. Apart from the context, the answer D prefers much phatically communicating to some extra meaning. However, sometimes, it also expresses some implied meaning, which is weaker than B. The extra meaning of the two answers is influenced by some pragmatic items, like speaker’s particular intension or ways of expressing.

For the construction’s perversity in mainland China, there are several factors can account for. The first one is national policy promoting communication. “ N_1 you V guo N_2 ” construction first appeared in south China, especially in Fujian province and Taiwan Province. Gradually, with the connection between mainland China and Taiwan in economics, culture, social customs, this construction has come into our life. Besides, the media or the celebrity’s influencing also helped the broadcasting of this construction. The following examples are collected from one piece of Hunan TV’s amusement program *Happy Camp* shows.

7) (from *Jiong He*)

ta you ma? ta you zai wai paixi ye zheyang ma?

him have him have outside film-making this

Did he? Has he doing like this when making films?

8) (from *Weijia Li*)

you, wo’men you bang ni zongjie le VCR.

have we have help you summarize VCR

Yes, we have made VCR for you.

9) (from *Jiong He*)

wo cengjing you jingli guo zheyang de shiqing.

me once have experience this thing

I have experienced such things.

10) (*from Jiong He*)

wo you bei huang yixia, keshi...

me have been shake once but

I have been shaken a little, but...

11) (*from Na Xie*)

zhihui gang tingdao you chang de budui de difang...

director now hear have sing wrong place

The director have heard something wrong when you singing.

12) (*from Jiong He*)

wo you shu gei guo Weijia.

me have lose person's name

I have lost against Weijia.

13) (*from Xin Wu*)

women zai dongbei de naci you qing guo nimen chang K a!

we live southeast that time have treat you sing

We have treated you with singing in the KTV when we were in southeast China.

14) (*from Na Xie*)

wo you faxian guo zhege.

me have find this

I have found this.

Besides, in one of the lectures given by a linguistic professor in a university, he also said “zuijin, wo ye you ba zhege fang dao wo jiang yao fabiao de lunwen zhong (Recently, I also have put this into my outcoming paper)”, which conforms to “N₁ you V guo N₂” construction. “you VP” here is a modern construction and “you” seems to be a mighty word.

It used to be thought that this construction is only used by women speakers. However, things turn out to be wrong. Besides celebrities' promotion, folk literature's appearance, dialectical words' diversity, together with the media and internet's expansion also can promote its populace. What's more, Chinese word forming is often based on prosody. The language users may think it as a construction easy for ears. According to Qiu (2011), the basic communication and speech function should be in accordance with the certain cultural ideas to gain the unity of most effects and least efforts. “N₁ you V guo N₂” construction is just formed in such a selection, gradually formed the best expression which has the cultural representation and register denotation functions.

2.4.2. Pragmaticalization Procedure of “N₁ you V guo N₂”

The basic theory of pragmaticalization is from Aijmer (1996) and it is different from grammaticalization. In a way, pragmaticalization is the pragmatic aspects of grammaticalization. The pragmatic markedness value⁴ (PMV) will be increa-

⁴The Pragmatic Markedness Value (PMV) is first proposed in Hou (2005).

singly high during the pragmaticalization process. As a result, the semantic meaning has been weakened. Hou (2008) held that pragmaticalization refers to the speech's individuality the language use. Directions of grammaticalization and pragmaticalization are different but differ in their results. We integrated macro grammaticalization and micro grammaticalization, that is, grammaticalization and pragmaticalization. The latter will produce pragmatic markers. The "you" in "N₁ you V guo N₂" construction as a pragmatic marker is out of its parts' pragmaticalization to make it a marked construction. "guo" also presupposes the grammaticality of "you". Fraser (1996) held that sentence meaning can be classified two parts: one is for propositional content and one is for pragmatic marker or mood marker. The latter part has four subtypes: radical marker, evaluative marker, parallel marker and discourse marker. Radical marker refers to the pragmatic marker which expresses its basic information. In the "N₁ you V guo N₂" construction, "you" has some polite refusal meaning by emphasizing the pastness of one thing. It can be taken as a radical marker. Discourse marker refers to the pragmatic marker that can denote the relations between basic information and foregrounding. Therefore, "you" can be a discourse marker because it can activate the hearers' cognitive world about the English perfect tense "have done" and the implied meaning that he does not need any more. Go back to the example 4), the "N₁ you V guo N₂" construction is just a kind of proper answer, which not only apply to the "VP le meiyou?" but also apply to the "N₁ you V guo N₂" construction, or the "you meiyou VP?". They have formed the sequential rank from marked to unmarked.

Originating from "you + VP" construction, the "N₁ you V guo N₂" construction is used to express the past meaning, like "V guo NP", "V le NP". Take "you" and "guo" into account, as well as some social, cognitive and pragmatic factors, it has gradually become the expression construction with certain emotional meaning and pragmatic strategies.

3. Conclusion

"N₁ you V guo N₂" construction has its complex features resulted from its particular structure. It can be regarded as the extension of "you VP" construction. The two kinds of construction have some similarities. Under the influence of "you" and "guo", it has a grammaticalized form. Besides, the integrated meaning of the whole construction is also influenced by some social, cognitive and pragmatic factors. Its pragmaticalization rooted in the lexicalization and grammaticalization of the two words, which we regard as pragmatic marker and tense auxiliary verb respectively. The co-occurrence of the two words adds the difficulty of explaining the meaning of the construction. It has very high pragmatic markedness value. It has experienced the process of pragmaticalization. However, there are also some flaws in our study, such as, we did not explain the interaction among parts of the construction and didn't well use the pragmaticalization theory to explain the construction. Therefore, we need suggestions and ad-

vice.

Acknowledgements

This work is supported by the Hunan Provincial Philosophical and Social Science Foundations of China (NO.17YBA172).

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Aijmer, K. (1996). *Conversational Routines in English: Convention and Creativity*. London: Longman.
- Bisang, W. et al. (2004). *What Makes Grammaticalization?—A Look from Its Fringes and Its Components*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110197440>
- Chen, B. Q. (2004). Origin and Extinction of Modal Particles “zai” and “you”. *Chinese Character Culture*, 4, 32.
- Chen, Q. R., & Wang, J. H. (2010). Multi-Functional Analysis of South Dialect “you” Clauses. *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, 4, 47.
- Chen, Y. L. (2011). *Modern Chinese Project Tutorial*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press.
- Dong, X. F. (2004). Main Verb “you meiyou” in Modern Chinese. *Language Teaching and Research*, 2, 1-3.
- Fang, M. (2005). Grammaticalization of Authentication-Meaning Predicate-Objective Verb—From Predicate-Objective Verb to Pragmatic Marker. *Studies of the Chinese Language*, 6, 504-505.
- Fraser, B. (1996). Pragmatic Markers. *Pragmatics*, 6, 23-26.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.6.2.03fra>
- Hopper, P. J., & Traugott, E. C. (1993). *Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Hou, G. J. (2007). Grammaticalization and Pragmaticalization: Investigated from Perspectives of Cognitive-Pragmatic and Pragma-Translatology. *Journal of Chongqing University*, 5, 119-122.
- Hou, G. J. (2008). *Dominant Pragmatic Issues and the Way to Pragmatranslatology*. Chengdu: Sichuan University Press.
- Hou, G. J. (2013). Criticism of the Eight Faults in Construction Grammar. *Foreign Languages Research*, 3, 2-11.
- Hyman, L. M. (1984). Form and Substance in Language Universals. In B. Butterworth et al. (Eds.), *Explanations or Language Universals* (pp. 67-85). Berlin: Mouton.
- Millet, A. (1912). L'évolution des formes grammaticales. *Scientia (Revisita di Scienza)*, 12, 130-148.
- Qiu, S. D. (2011). Pragmaticalization and Pragmatic Markers. *Foreign Languages in China*, 3, 30-36.
- Shi, Y. Z. (2004). The Effect of Social Average Value on Grammar: The Motivation for the Emergence of Scalar Meaning of “you”. *Language Science*, No. 6, 16-26.

- Sun, C. F. (1994). Comments on Grammaticalization Theory. *Foreign Linguistics*, 4, 19-25.
- Taylor, J. R. (1996). *Possessives in English: An Exploration in Cognitive Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press/Clarendon.
- Wang, S. et al. (2006). “you meiyou/you/meiyou + VP” Clauses. *Studies of the Chinese Language*, 1, 10.
- Wang, Y. (2006). *An Introduction to Cognitive Grammar*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Wang, Y. (2013). Neo-Cog-Pragmatics—Cog-Social Research Trends of Language. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, 1, 1-4.
- Wen, X. (2001). Grammaticalization and Discussion on Some Related Issues. *Research in Foreign Language & Literature*, 2, 39-43.
- Xue, H. W., & Yan, M. Y. (2011). Grammaticalization of “Youqing” and Production Mechanism of “You” as Subjective Affix. *Chinese Linguistics*, 2, 14.
- Yuan, Y. L. et al. (2009). Situational Meaning Analysis of “You” Clauses. *World Foreign Language Teaching*, 3, 291.
- Zhao, J. J. (2013). “You” as the Topic Marker. *Chinese Language Learning*, No. 1, 65-71.
- Zheng, M. H. (2009). Semantic and Pragmatic Functions of “You + VP” Structure in Fuzhou Dialect. *Journal of Fujian Normal University*, 6, 92.
- Zheng, M. H. (2010). Origin of “You + VP” Structure in Fujian Dialect. *Journal of Chifeng Institute*, 10, 111-112.
- Zhong, C. H. (2013). Auxiliarization Evolution Process of “guo”. *Journal of Lanzhou Institute of Education*, No. 2, 26-27.
- Zhu, D. X. (1981). *Grammar Notes*. Beijing: Commercial Press.