

The Analysis of the Structure “There Is No More Y than X” “没有比X更Y的(了)” and the Study of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Ying Huang¹, Shuangyue Shao²

¹Baoding University, Baoding, China

²NO.1 Hospital, Baoding, China

Email: hyingmm@126.com, Yue258@163.com

How to cite this paper: Huang, Y., & Shao, S. Y. (2019). The Analysis of the Structure “There Is No More Y than X” “没有比X更Y的(了)” and the Study of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 9, 97-103. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2019.92010>

Received: March 29, 2019

Accepted: April 25, 2019

Published: April 28, 2019

Copyright © 2019 by author(s) 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 subjective structure with comparative structure is one of the commonly used structures in modern Chinese spoken language. It is highly subjective with a large number of subjective structures. This paper makes a detailed analysis of the structure of “There is no more Y than X” from the aspects of syntactic function, semantics and pragmatics. From the perspective of structure grammar theory, this paper discusses the construction method of Chinese as a foreign language in order to provide some reference for Chinese teaching.

Keywords

Structure, “There Is No More Y than X”, Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

1. The Syntactic Function of “There Is No More Y than X”

The syntactic component of a structure refers to what the structure acts as a whole in a sentence. The component of the structure is very compact, and the whole structure is actually a sentence with complete semantic expression. Therefore, in general, the structure can be used as a sentence alone or as a clause of a compound sentence. For example:

1) She completes her work perfectly and targets development on economy without failure before. Therefore, there is no better candidate for this position than her.

2) When working in Microsoft, I could not say that I am the most diligent employee of Microsoft, but I dare say that there is no more diligent employee in

Microsoft than I am.

Let's see the examples (1) and (2), and we find that the construction is generally used in complex sentences, and these complex sentences generally represent conclusions. For example, in the example sentence (1), it first describes that "she" is very capable, and finally draws a conclusion that "there is no more suitable person than her". "There is no more Y than X" is as a clause of a compound sentence, and as a concluding clause, you can use some related words that represent the result, such as "so, therefore, in short", etc. These clauses have strong subjectivity. "There is no more Y than X". In addition to being a clause in a complex sentence, it can also stand alone as an ideographically complete sentence. At this time, the sentence must exist in a specific context, or the object of the sentence is typical and well known. For example:

3) There are no more intelligent people than Zhuge Liang.

4) There is no more terrible natural disaster than the earthquake.

"Zhuge Liang" is a historical figure familiar to both the speakers and the listeners. His most typical feature is "smart"; the "earthquake" is also a well-known catastrophe with its most typical feature "terrible". The first condition for the establishment of these sentences is that people are familiar with X in the construction and understand and agree with the characteristics of X. Moreover, when the construction is independent of a sentence, the meaning expressed is also very subjective. "There is no more Y than X", in addition to being able to act as a clause and a separate sentence in complex sentences, it occasionally acts as an object in one sentence. Such as:

5) I don't think there is anyone better than him.

At this time, the construction of the whole generally appears after the psychological verbs that are often used as predicates, such as "feel, think". The constructions also serve as complements.

6) Nothing can be done more satisfactorily than this.

By analyzing the corpus, we find that the construct can't be a subject, a predicate or an attributive, which is related to the compact internal structure of the construction itself and the complete content of the component itself; moreover, the construction cannot act as adverbial. In the previous part, we discussed that the "no" at the beginning of the construction is the antonym of the verb "you", which means the verb "nonexistence". Since the verb component cannot modify the verb, the whole structure cannot be used as an adverbial. To sum up, in most cases, "there is no more Y than X" can be formed independently: as a conclusive clause in complex sentences and as a separate sentence. Generally speaking, it seldom acts as an object or complement in a sentence, and basically cannot act as a subject, predicate, attributive or adverbial.

2. The Semantic Analysis of "There Is No More Y than X"

This construction is a strong subjective in semantic expression. By negating the word "nonexistence" at the beginning, the whole sentence has the extreme meaning of "X is the most Y", and the premise of the establishment of this ex-

treme meaning is that there must be a certain context.

2.1. For Comparison

The construction is compound as the whole, and the most important part is the comparative sentence, out of which the meaning of the whole construction is obvious. After the compound sentences, the comparative meaning has not changed, but the comparison object has changed from open to closed, and exists within the cognitive range of the speaker and the listener. For example:

7) Schmalsteick said: “For Asia’s largest information technology exhibition, there is no better place to host than Shanghai, China”.

In this sentence, the comparative object X in the comparative sentence in the compound sentence is “Shanghai, China”, while the unknown object compared with “Shanghai, China” is an open object. This unknown place can be anywhere. When in the compound sentence, this non-appearing comparison object is changed from open to closed, exists in the speaker’s perception of Schmalsteick, and becomes an object with boundaries. Speaker Schmalsteick first thought that “Shanghai, China is a good place to hold information technology exhibitions”. For the speaker, “Shanghai, China is the most suitable place to hold the largest information technology exhibition in Asia” is also the conclusion drawn by subconsciously comparing with all the places he knows. Although the process of comparison is implicit, the results of the comparison are still obvious. The final expression of this construction is the ultimate meaning of “X is the most Y”. The ultimate meaning of things can only be obtained by comparison. If we only observe it in parallel, we will not find the difference in degree and traits. This is also in line with people’s recognition process.

2.2. For Negative Existence

The construction is generated by two sentence patterns, the second sentence is a comparison sentence, and the first one is a “(no) sentence with a negative existence”. The verb “no” negates the sentence when in the compound sentence, indicating that “there is no more Y than X” does not exist. In fact, it is the affirmation of the “X is the most Y”. This negative existence further highlights the subjectivity of the construction. For example:

8) Foreign counterparts asked me if there is any writer in China who is greater than Mr. Lu Xun. I said no.

In the case of (8), it shows the speaker’s subjective feeling that “in my mind, there is no greater writer in China now than Lu Xun”. Comparisons have been made in the speaker’s subconscious mind. In his existing cognitive content “Lu Xun is the greatest writer”. “No” means “nothing”, and the negation of the whole sentence emphasizes that this is the subjective perception of the speaker that “does not exist”. Therefore, the negative existential meaning of the whole construction is built in the category of subjective cognition. The context is different, the presupposition will also change; and presupposition will also vary in

different speakers' cognitive practices. When the condition is true, the most important function of negating the meaning of existence is to highlight the fact that presupposition is true in the speaker's subjectivity.

In summary, the negative existence of the construction is to emphasize the authenticity of the presupposition, and to express the strong subjectivity and exaggeration of the sentence.

2.3. For Exaggeration

The construction "there is no more Y than X" is formed by "no worded sentences" ("没有字句") and comparative sentences, negating the existence of the condition compared with the comparison object X, to highlight that the comparison object is an existence. The ultimate meaning, which is "X is the most Y" is in the subjective consciousness of the speaker, with a strong emotion. "There is no more Y than X" with exaggeration feature, expresses the speaker's more exaggerated significance.

9) There is no girl who is more silly than her.

The semantics expressed in example (9) is "she is the most silly girl", which is the subjective feeling of the speaker. This semantic exists in the subjective consciousness of the speaker and carries the exaggerated meaning of the speaker. In reality, "She is not necessarily the most silly girl", but the speaker thinks that she is the most silly. All of this shows the speaker's exaggeration.

3. Pragmatic Analysis of "There Is No More Y than X"

In verbal communication, the speaker can adjust the language to the required syntactic form based on his own needs. According to the needs of communication, the information structure composed by language users is called "discourse structure", which is generally composed of two parts: topic and report. The so-called "topic" refers to the object of the statement, the person or animal that is stated in a sentence; the "report" is a statement of the topic, and is a further statement of the person or animal. From a pragmatic point of view, the construction "there is no more Y than X" is to compare two things or to compare the nature and state of one aspect of X, and finally come to the conclusion that "X is the most Y". Among them, X is the topic and "Y" is the report, so this construction is a typical structure of "topic + report". In fact the entire sentence is a statement of the topic X. When expressing the ultimate semantics, the sentence has certain requirements for communicative context, which requires the speaker and the listener to have a common cognitive structure. For example:

10) The President of the UN General Assembly, Do Amaral, said that today, for the international community, there is no more serious challenge than the development of Africa. Africa faces many problems—poverty, political instability, internal conflicts and so on.

Example (10) expresses the semantics of "Africa's development is the most serious problem", which is based on the context. First of all, our cognitive com-

mon sense is that Africa is relatively poor and backward, and its development is very important. Secondly, the context of this sentence is “for the international community” “Africa faces many problems—poverty, political instability, internal conflicts” Because of this context, we can conclude that “there is no more serious challenge than Africa’s development”.

The constructions require not only certain contextual conditions, but also the expression of the speaker’s personal subjective emotion, in which great exaggeration. For example:

11) Ai Wen said: “Without me, Gongjia will surely die. I feel that for a soldier’s wife, there is nothing more valuable than to continue the life of a soldier”.

In the case of (11), the speaker thinks that “there is no more valuable than continuing a soldier’s life”. This is the subjective thought of the speaker, and this cognition is exaggerated. For a woman, there are many valuable things in her life. The speaker uses this construction to emphasize what she wants to do, so it has subjective exaggeration. It is not difficult to find that the use of this construction is a strong expression of emotion. This exaggerated construction of the speaker’s subjective feelings is more applicable to dialogue or emotional description, so it is basically used in oral or novel styles, and basically does not appear in rigorous, scientific and technological literatures.

In summary, in the construction “there is no more Y than X”, X is the topic, the object to be stated. The whole sentence is the statement of X, the meaning of expression is “X is the most Y”. The use of construction requires a certain context, and the expression of constructions has a strong subjective emotion, in which exaggeration is strong, Due to these factors, the construction is mostly used in oral or novel background.

4. The Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language under the Construction Grammar

“Subjective quantity” is the specific embodiment of language subjectivity in a quantitative category, which is a kind of quantity with subjective feeling, attitude and assessment meaning. Outside of China, research carried out on this subject is early, and subjectivity and subjectivism research became a hot point for linguistic research until Langacker (1990), Traugott (1995) and Lyons (1995). Domestic attention to the quantitative category is long-standing, including Gao Mingkai (1948), Wang Li (1954), Zhao Yuanren (1979), Zhu Dexi (1980), Lu Jianming (1989). The first one who examined “subjective quantity” was Ma Zhen (1981), but Chen Xiaohe (1994) proposed conception of “subjective quantity” at the very first time.

Since the emergence of constructive grammar, many scholars have explored the language ontology from its theoretical characteristics, explained some special linguistic phenomena. It provides many references for the acquisition and teaching of Chinese to use another new perspective on Chinese teaching, thus providing new ways of thinking and new methods for Chinese teaching.

The traditional grammatical concept holds that verbs play a dominant role in

sentences. Because there is no change in form in Chinese, grammatical meanings are often used in word order and function words. Therefore, many people also think that function words also have the function of determining sentence meaning. Influenced by the traditional grammatical concept of “verb-centered theory”, Chinese teachers tend to attach great importance to verbs and function words in the process of teaching, believing that the meaning of sentences is determined by them. But as we said, “There is no more Y than X”, if the teacher only focuses on the “no” and “more” explanations, for example, “Xiaoming does not jump as high as his brother” and “Xiaoming jumps higher”, the students will be easier to understand, but when “no” and “more” appear in the sentence at the same time, the students will have a hard time understanding. The grammatical meaning of the expression is contradictory, which will lead to the misunderstandings of the students.

The meaning of a sentence is not a simple addition of a phrase or the meaning of a word in a sentence. Constructive grammar holds that construction is dominant in a sentence, and the meaning of the sentence is not a simple addition of partial meaning. As we also said earlier, in teaching if we think of such a sentence as “there is no more Y than Y” as the whole, and the ultimate meaning of the whole construction expression is “X is the most Y”. The ultimate meaning can only be obtained by comparison. Then students will not pick and choose the words to understand the meaning of “no” and “more” which combines them together. The constructive grammar enlightens us that for certain sentences, the scholar should integrate them as a whole constructive for explanation, rather than fragmented analysis.

5. Conclusion

This paper analyzes the structure of “not more important than Y” from the aspects of syntactic function, semantics and pragmatics, and emphasizes the importance of constructive grammar in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The author believes that scholars should integrate the entire structure into a constructive interpretation rather than a decentralized analysis. Due to the limitations of the basics, the analysis of the teaching techniques of Chinese as a foreign language is not sufficient. This topic can only be a preliminary discussion, limited to description and analysis. Therefore, there are many shortcomings that require further study and explanation in the future.

Funding

Project: 2018 Hebei Provincial Social Science Fund Project.

Project Name: A Study on the Subjective Quantitative Construction with Comparative Structure of Modern Chinese.

Project No. HB18YY001.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Chen, X. H. (1994). Preliminary Study on Subjective Quantity—On the Adverb “Just”, “CAI”, “All”. *World Chinese Language Teaching*, 4, 18-24.
- Gao, M. K. (1948). *Chinese Grammar*. Shanghai: Shanghai Kai Ming Bookstore.
- Langacker, R. M. (1990). Subjectification. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 1, 5-38.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/cogl.1990.1.1.5>
- Lu, J. M. (1989). Measuring Adjectives. *Language Teaching and Research*, 3, 46-59.
- Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistics Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511810213>
- Ma, Z. (1981). The Adverb of Modification of Quantitative Words. *Language Teaching and Research*, No. 1, 53-60.
- Traugott, E. C. (1995). *Subjectification in Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wang, L. (1954). *Author of Chinese Grammar Theory*. Beijing: Zhonghua Publishing House.
- Zhao, Y. R. (1979). *Spoken Chinese Grammar*. Beijing: Commercial Press.
- Zhu, D. X. (1980). *Study on Modern Chinese Grammar*. Beijing: Commercial Press.