

Research on Negative Construction of “One Quantifier N” in International Chinese Teaching

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Abstract—Negative Construction of “One Quantifier N” has been one of the difficulties of teaching Chinese to foreign students. Quantifiers in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” are restricted, and such selection restrictions are closely associated with the markedness of quantifiers. This paper makes an attempt to investigate the selection restrictions from the perspective of the markedness of quantifiers. The paper claims that when the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” is used to express complete negation, unmarked quantifiers are more readily acceptable and natural than marked ones in the construction; and less marked quantifiers can also appear in the construction, but is less readily acceptable and natural; and the more marked the quantifier is, the less natural, acceptable it will be in the construction. Feasible suggestions are accordingly put forward to solve the problems existing in the teaching of Negative Construction of “One Quantifier N”.

Index Terms—negative construction of “One Quantifier N”, markedness, selection restriction, teaching strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

As a unique language phenomenon in Sino-Tibetan language family, quantifiers have captured great attention from scholars and have been extensively examined from various perspectives, including grammaticalization, lexicalization, typology, and cognitive linguistics and so on. Negative construction of “One Quantifier N” is one of the special constructions formed by quantifier and noun, but little attention has been fixed on the teaching of the construction. We maintain that the study of negative construction of “One Quantifier N” is conducive to international Chinese teaching. This paper will explore the selection restrictions from the perspective of the markedness of quantifiers, analyzing reasons for errors in the study of negative construction of “One Quantifier N”, and accordingly put forward some feasible strategies for the international Chinese teaching.

Current researches on negative construction of “One Quantifier N” have been mainly devoted to two provinces, that is, classification of the construction and comparisons between the two subcategories of the construction, and selection restrictions on quantifiers in the construction. Negative construction of “One Quantifier N” can be further divided into two subcategories according to the word order within it (Guo, 1998; Dai, 2000; Ni, 2001; Hu, 2004/2006/2007; Liu, 2007; Cui, 2013), that is:

A: One + Quantifier + Negation

e.g. 一个人也没有 “No one”

One Quantifier Person No

B: Negation + One + Quantifier Person

e.g. 没有一个人 “No one”

No One Quantifier Person

As for the two subcategories, different scholars maintain different opinions. According to Guo (1998), A and B are the same. He further explained that A is constructed by transferring the focus of B to the front, and the only distinction between the two lies in their surface structure, which results from the arrangement of focus and other information structures. A makes the focus prominent, thus conforming to Chinese convention though compared with B it is abnormal in word order. Therefore it is more acceptable and widely used. Similarly, Dai (2000) held that A is generated by shifting the object of B to the front. But Ni (2001) maintained that A and B are parallel structures because they have the same focus and sequence. Hu (2007) thought that they are semantically equal after he found both of them express the concept of complete negation and enjoy high frequency of use. As oppose to the ideas above, Liu (2007) proclaimed that A is endowed with higher degree of negation than B though they all express complete negation. Cui (2013) also pointed out the asymmetrical relation between the two.

Selection restrictions on quantifiers in negative construction of “One Quantifier N” have been investigated by Li (2000) and Hu (2006). Li was especially concerned with A and he further distinguished two kinds within A, claiming that the first kind in A is compatible with a wide range of quantifiers and seldom has any restrictions (2000, p189).

Hu (2006) disagreed with him and conducted his research from the perspective of the theory of “the governing force of clauses”. He found that negative construction of “One Quantifier N” does have some restrictions for quantifiers appearing in it and three rules were summarized by him.

Quantifiers which can appear in negative construction of “One Quantifier N”, meaning complete negation, must be at the bottom of a ranking order, expressing the minimal, indivisible quantity.

Only those general quantifiers that are frequently and widely used and attached with no stylistic or emotional meaning can appear in negative construction of “One Quantifier N” freely with high acceptability.

Whether a quantifier can appear in negative construction of “One Quantifier N” rests upon language users’ perception of the quantifier, but is anyway constrained by the objective world.

Though the three rules are seemingly plausible, they fail to provide a concise and clear explanation for such a language phenomenon. First of all, it is too assertive to claim that only quantifiers at the bottom of a ranking order can appear in negative construction of “One Quantifier N”. Take the ranking order “Yuan (元), Mao (毛)/Jiao (角), Fen (分)” as an example. According to Hu, only Fen (分) can be found in the negative construction. But based on CCL Corpus, we found that Mao (毛) can also be used and even enjoyed high frequency of use. The following examples are quoted from the CCL Corpus: “因为日方连一毛钱也不肯出 (because the Japanese didn’t even take out one penny)”, “并没为公司赚到一毛钱 (...even didn’t make one penny profit for the company)” etc. Secondly, the third rule is poorly defined. Due to its vagueness, it is difficult to determine whether a quantifier can enter the construction. Thirdly, Hu has not explained the relationship between the three rules, that is, whether the rules work independently or interdependently.

However, based on markedness theory, problems confronting Hu will be settled down. In other words, selection restrictions on quantifiers in negative construction of “One Quantifier N” are closely related to markedness of quantifiers.

II. MARKEDNESS THEORY

Markedness reflects the phenomenon of asymmetrical distribution in language. Markedness theory, proposed by the Russian linguist Trubetzkoy who is member of the Prague School, is an important concept in structuralism. Then it was developed by many other scholars and extended to other areas including syntax, semantics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics and applied linguistics etc. As for the determination of whether a linguistic phenomenon is marked or not, various criteria have been provided by researchers from both home and abroad. In addition, scholars have also expounded why markedness is employed in language use. The following section will make a brief introduction of markedness theory from three aspects, that is, development of markedness theory, criteria for markedness, and explanations for markedness.

A. *Development of Markedness Theory*

After initiation, markedness theory has found its way in various fields because of its power for the explanation of asymmetrical language phenomena and has gained new meaning.

Jacobson first introduced markedness theory into lexical and grammatical researches to describe lexical and syntactical phenomena. Chomsky and Halle (1968) inherited the concept of markedness from the Prague School and they assigned markedness value to every distinctive feature which they used to analyze phonemes. Lyons (1977) conducted a thorough investigation on markedness in semantics, and he made a distinction among formal marking, distributional marking and semantic marking, claiming that semantic markedness of a lexeme is only a matter of degree. From the aspect of syntax, Halliday (1994) distinguished “marked theme” and “unmarked theme” in his functional grammar. Linguistic typology further developed the theory from two aspects. Firstly, it examined markedness from a multi-pattern perspective instead of traditional dichotomy, that is, it is not the case that marked items stand in binary opposition to unmarked terms but that there is a continuum between the two. Secondly, markedness theory based on linguistic typology attempts to construct an interrelated pattern by connecting different categories rather than build a markedness pattern within one category. American linguist Givon (1995) brought markedness theory into pragmatics. He argued that linguistic markedness rests upon context and even context itself can be divided into “marked” and “unmarked”. In addition, markedness theory has also been conducive to researches in second language acquisition, semiotics etc., and gained further development in related areas.

B. *Criteria for Markedness*

Markedness is the core concept in markedness theory, but what linguistic phenomena are marked and what not? Various criteria have been provided.

At the very beginning, three criteria have been established by the Prague School, i.e. syntagmatic complexity, paradigmatic complexity, and distribution (Newmeyer, 1998). In detail, syntagmatic complexity refers to the fact that morphemes in unmarked terms is less than or equal to that in marked ones, that is to say, unmarked terms are syntagmatically simpler. Paradigmatic complexity says that inflectional forms of unmarked terms are more than marked ones or unmarked terms appear in more structures than marked ones do. Distribution denotes that unmarked terms are characterized by higher frequency of use in both speech and written discourse compared with marked ones.

When markedness theory was extended to linguistic typology, Greenberg, the initiator of linguistic typology, proposed thirteen criteria, including five phonological criteria and eight morphosyntactic ones (Tang, 2003). The five phonological criteria say:

- a) In neutral context, unmarked terms, instead of marked ones are realized.
- b) Unmarked terms are endowed with higher frequency than, or, at least, equal to marked ones in discourse.
- c) Unmarked terms enjoy wider or equivalent distribution in phonological environment compared with marked ones.
- d) Allophones of unmarked terms are more than or equal to that of marked ones.
- e) More phonemes are characterized by unmarkedness rather than markedness.

Eight morphosyntactic criteria include:

- a. Marked terms can be realized by more morphemes than unmarked ones.
- b. Inflectional forms of unmarked terms exceed or equate that of marked ones.
- c. Under certain circumstances, unmarked terms can be utilized to refer to both the marked and unmarked, that is, unmarked terms can be regarded as supercategory.
- d. Only unmarked terms appear in neutral context.
- e. Allomorphs or inflections of unmarked terms are more than or equal to that of marked ones.
- f. Grammatical varieties of unmarked terms are more than or equal to that of marked ones.
- g. (Grammatical categories confined to “Number”) plural forms of gender of unmarked terms can inclusively denote masculinity and femininity.
- h. Unmarked terms turn up more frequently than, or as frequently as marked ones in discourse.

As can be seen, Greenberg’s thirteen criteria seem redundant. Croft (1990) reduced them to four categories: structural criterion, behavioral criterion, frequency criterion and neutral value criterion. Structural criterion denotes that morphemes of marked terms in a grammatical category is more than, or equal to that of unmarked ones. Behavioral criterion include two sub-criteria, i.e. inflectional criterion which is also a morphological criterion, that is, inflectional forms of marked terms are less than or equal to that of unmarked ones, and distributional criterion which is also a syntactic criterion, that is, unmarked constructions in syntax can be applied in more syntactic contexts than marked ones. Frequency criterion refers to the phenomenon that unmarked terms possess the characteristics of higher frequency from discursal and cross-linguistic perspectives. Neutral value criterion reveals that only unmarked terms appear in certain neutral context, or rather, unmarked terms can be used as super-category to refer to both the marked and unmarked. Givon (1995) argued that cognitive complexity is also an important criterion for determining whether a linguistic phenomenon is marked or not.

Shen Jiaxuan (1999), with reference to Chinese, based on Croft’s four criteria, recategorized those criteria into six categories: syntagmatic criterion, paradigmatic criterion, frequency criterion, distributional criterion, semantic criterion and diachronic criteria. Meanwhile, he pointed out that distributional and frequency criteria are especially significant to languages like Chinese which lacks inflections.

Though criteria for markedness vary from different perspectives, scholars have generally achieved a consensus that formal complexity, distribution and frequency all play a vital role.

C. *Explanations for Markedness*

According to Shen (1999), the phenomenon of markedness is pragmatically and cognitively motivated.

From the pragmatic perspective, markedness is given rise to because of economy, one of the principles in pragmatics. In other words, speakers try to reduce their efforts of speaking as much as possible, provided that they have conveyed their intentions clearly and accurately, thus, making the unmarked prominent. Other pragmatic principles, such as Cooperative Principle, are also responsible for markedness.

Markedness is also closely related to human cognition. It is held that cognitively salient, prototypical concepts or the unmarked, are much more attractive, and can be readily stored and retrieved in information processing. In addition to prototypicality, iconicity also accounts. In detail, markedness resembles natural order and compositional order of cognition. Those marked are marked because they are cognitively extraordinary, complicated, and unexpected.

III. MARKEDNESS OF QUANTIFIERS

On the basis of those criteria discussed in the second part, quantifiers generally fall into two categories, that is, those characterized by markedness and those unmarked.

A. *Unmarked Quantifiers vs. Marked Quantifiers*

Unmarked quantifiers are those that are equipped with higher frequency and wider range of usage, and without any stylistic or emotional meaning. Take Ge (个), Wei (位), and Ming (名) as an example. They express the same concept as quantifiers when co-occurring with nouns, for instance, “一个作家, 一名作家, 一位作家 (One writer)”, but they are not equal in status. In comparison, Ge (个) is neutral in both stylistic and emotional meaning, thus, widely applicable in most contexts, while Wei (位) and Ming (名) are much more formal and usually found in written text and other formal occasions. Similar stylistically and emotionally neutral quantifiers also includes Tiao (条) concurring with fish, Ben (本)

concurring with book, Fu (幅) collocating with painting, etc., which stand in contrast to their respective counterpart(s) Wei (尾), Ce (册)/Bu (部), Zhang (张)/Zhen (帧), etc. As is contrary to unmarked quantifiers, marked ones are much more unexpected and complex and as a consequence, more restricted in use. For example, compounding quantifiers, such as sortie (架次), Renci (人次), etc., quantifiers confined in contexts of natural science, such as gallon (加仑), ampere (安培), etc., and borrowing quantifiers, such as inch (英寸), mile (英里), etc., are not only abnormal but also complicated both semantically and structurally, and thus limited to special usage.

Unmarked quantifiers are also cognitively primary. For example, Fen (分) is unmarked while Jiao (角) and Yuan (元) are marked because Fen (分) is the basis upon which Jiao (角) and Yuan (元) are constructed, or rather, the concept of Jiao (角) and Yuan (元) are cognitively structured by the concept of Fen (分). Other similar examples entail the contrasts among Gen (根), Bao (包), and Tiao (条) which concurring with cigarettes, Cun (寸), Chi (尺), Zhang (丈) which co-occurring with land, etc.

B. *Markedness of Quantifiers as a Continuum*

As is in accordance with markedness of other linguistic phenomena, the markedness of quantifiers is not a complementary opposition either, but rather a continuum. In this sense, as for those marked quantifiers, there is a degree of markedness. To put it in another way, some quantifiers are more marked than others. Still take Fen (分), Jiao (角) and Yuan (元) as an instance. As have been expounded, Fen (分) is unmarked while Jiao (角) and Yuan (元) are marked. But compared to Jiao (角), Yuan (元) is more marked, since the construction of the concept Yuan (元) from Fen (分) requires more cognitive efforts than that of Jiao (角). Similar conclusions can also be drawn as far as quantifiers including Gen (根), Bao (包), and Tiao (条), Cun (寸), Chi (尺), Zhang (丈), etc., are concerned.

IV. SELECTION RESTRICTIONS ON QUANTIFIERS IN NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF “ONE QUANTIFIER N”

Negative construction of “One Quantifier N” has strong preference for the quantifiers. Only quantifiers satisfying certain requirement can appear in the construction. We find that such requirement, or selection restriction, is bound up with markedness of quantifiers. Therefore, in the section, selection restriction on quantifiers in negative construction of “One Quantifier N” will be examined in terms of the markedness of quantifiers. Meanwhile, possible explanations for such a restriction will be provided.

A. *Selection Restriction Based on the Markedness of Quantifiers*

Though scholars have noticed that there are some restrictions on quantifiers in negative construction of “One Quantifier N” and conducted related tentative researches, especially, Hu Qingguo (2006) who has delved into the field from the perspective of the theory of “the governing force of clauses” and attempted to provide possible principles for the selection restrictions, most of their findings are exposed to doubts and remain to be examined.

However, in reference to markedness theory, we noticed that quantifiers are not symmetrically distributed, or rather, characterized by markedness. On the other hand, quantifiers appearing in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” are closely linked up to such a phenomenon of markedness. Based on CCL corpus and careful exploration, the selection restriction on quantifiers in negative construction of “One Quantifier N” can be described as:

A. When the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” is used to express the concept of complete negation, unmarked quantifiers are more natural, applicable and acceptable than marked ones in this construction;

B. (Though some marked quantifiers can appear in the construction) The more marked the quantifier is, the less natural, applicable and acceptable it is in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” conveying complete negation.

A can be illustrated by the example of Ben (本), and Ce (册)/Bu (部). As has been discussed in part three, Ben (本) is unmarked while Ce (册)/Bu (部) are marked. According to the statement of A, Ben (本) is more natural, applicable and acceptable in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” denoting complete negation than Ce (册)/Bu (部). Such an assumption can be verified by the CCL corpus. When consulting the CCL corpus, tremendous example sentences containing Ben (本) in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” denoting complete negation can be found, e.g. “家里没有一本书 (There are no books at home), 一本书也没有出版过 (...has not published one book yet), 没有一本书上有我要算的问题的答案 (No book can provide the answer for the question haunting me)”. However, no sentences containing Ce (册) have been found in the corpus in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” signifying complete negation and only few examples for Bu (部) which are usually reserved for formal use, such as “...还没有一部书能像《红楼梦》那样呈现出永久的艺术魅力 (...no other book has embodied with enduring artistic charm as the A Dream in Red Mansions has)”.

B can be exemplified by Fen (分), Jiao (角) and Yuan (元). It has been proved that Fen (分) is unmarked while Jiao (角) and Yuan (元) and compared with Yuan (元), Jiao (角) is less marked. In this sense, in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N”, Fen (分) is the most natural, applicable and acceptable among the three, while Jiao (角) also acceptable and Yuan (元) is the least acceptable for conveying the meaning of complete negation. Such a claim can also find its basis in CCL corpus. More examples as to sentences with Fen (分) in the negative construction of “One

Quantifier N” meaning complete negation, such as “现在村里办公费一分钱也没 (Not one penny of office allowance has been left now), 他从四月份到现在没有拿到一分钱 (He has not got one penny from April till now)”, have been singled out. There are also considerable amount of sentences with Jiao (角), such as “你包袱里一毛钱都没有 (You have no money in your pocket)”. Though in very rare case Yuan (元) is also used in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” meaning complete negation, for example, “可家里已是一元钱都没有 (but there is no money at home)”, it is not widely acceptable and unnatural.

Compared with the principles given by Hu (2006), the rules from the perspective of the markedness of quantifiers is more objective in the description of the selection restrictions on quantifiers in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N”, especially when it comes to quantifiers with different degree of markedness appearing in the construction. In addition, problems confronting Hu can also be shunted. In conclusion, examined from the perspective of the markedness of quantifiers, the selection restrictions on quantifiers in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” are more precise, concise and plausible.

B. *Explanation for the Selection Restriction*

The fact that only unmarked quantifiers (sometimes less marked ones) are more natural and acceptable in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” when conveying the meaning of complete negation leads us to delve into the motivation underlying such a phenomenon. Possible reasons may emerge when ideas from pragmatics and cognition are taken into consideration.

According to Shen Jiakuan (1999) and Shi Yuzhi (2001), there is an asymmetrical relation between affirmation and negation and compared with affirmation, negation is marked, because of its frequency of use, simplicity in structure and economy in cognition. It has been stated in the second part that as long as they can express their intentions clearly and accurately, language users will try to reduce their efforts of speaking as much as possible. In this case, speakers are apt to utilize unmarked (or less marked) quantifiers in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” which is itself marked so that they can be economic. In addition, if they employ marked quantifiers in the construction which has already required tremendous cognitive efforts, more cognitive efforts will be needed. Therefore, from a cognitive effective perspective, unmarked (or less marked) quantifiers are more acceptable.

V. THE TEACHING OF NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF “ONE QUANTIFIER N”

Reasons for the errors of negative construction of “One Quantifier N” will be analyzed as follows in the first part, and strategies put forward in the second part.

A. *Reasons for the Errors*

1. *Negative transfer of mother tongue*

The knowledge of mother tongue has greatly influenced second language learners before the acquisition of second language, thus second language learners tend to study Chinese by codes of their mother tongues, which may exert a negative influence, called negative transfer. Quantifiers are unique in Chinese. However, second language learners usually fail to master the concept of quantifiers, and under which circumstances, negative transfer may lead to errors.

2. *Negative transfer of target language*

Learners tend to apply limited and insufficient knowledge of target languages to new phenomena of target languages by way of analogy, which is called over-generalization. Most second language learners are adults with good abstract logic thinking, and they are good at applying limited knowledge to other phenomena of target language, causing inappropriate over-generalization errors.

B. *Strategies for International Chinese Language*

1. *Contrastive teaching method*

Teachers should attach great importance to the contrastive teaching of synonymous quantifiers. Synonymous quantifiers share similar meaning and measuring range, and thus delicate differences usually become difficult points. Summary teaching can be arranged to review and compare synonymous quantifiers after a certain number of quantifiers have been taught, from which the differences and similarities of synonymous quantifiers could be revealed, such as emotional color, connotations.

2. *Context teaching*

Teachers should create more opportunities for students to use quantifiers besides explaining, so that students become aware of contexts and pragmatic elements of the situation in which a quantifier could be properly used. Acquisition of a second language can be made by using it, since using language by imitating real communication has a better effect on language study than mechanically practicing.

VI. CONCLUSION

Markedness reflects the asymmetrical phenomenon in language and markedness theory is endowed with mighty explaining power and has been widely applied to various areas of researches, such as phonology, phonetics, syntax,

semantic, pragmatics, linguistic typology, etc. On the other hand, the distribution of quantifiers in Chinese has proven to be asymmetrical. In this sense, quantifiers can be distinguished between unmarked and marked ones on the basis of markedness theory. As for the negative construction of “One Quantifier N”, quantifiers in it are not without constraints. On the contrary, they are restricted and such selection restrictions are intimately connected with the markedness of quantifiers.

This paper has attempted to conduct an in-depth investigation of the selection restrictions on quantifiers in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” from the perspective of the markedness of quantifiers. Two major rules have been found, that is, when the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” is used to express the concept of complete negation, unmarked quantifiers are more natural, applicable and acceptable than marked ones in this construction and the more marked the quantifier is, the less natural, applicable and acceptable it will be. Through the approach, a more plausible, concise and clear explanation of the selection restrictions on quantifiers in the negative construction of “One Quantifier N” has been offered.

Last but not the least, this paper reveals problems of negative construction of “One Quantifier N” existing in international Chinese teaching, and propose some useful strategies for international Chinese teaching.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper is supported by the following projects: The Education and Teaching Reform Project in Southwest University (2013JY094), The Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (SWU1509176), and The Higher Education and Teaching Reform Project in Chongqing (153030).

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