

Analysis of the Imagery of the Chinese Ba-construction from a Cognitive Perspective

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Abstract. The Ba-construction is a unique sentence form in Chinese that expresses the semantics of “disposition”, “causing”, and “purpose”. It has always been a critical research point in modern Chinese. In recent years, with the continuous development of cognitive linguistics theory, more and more researchers have applied it to the study of Ba-construction. In this article, we analyze the imagery schema of the Ba-construction according to the imagery schema theory of cognitive linguistics and classify it into four types: displacement schema, container schema, balance schema and circumferential coverage schema. The analysis of the Ba-construction in the cognitive domain is an essential inspiration and cognitive value for the in-depth understanding of the structure of the Ba-construction and other Chinese sentence patterns.

Keywords: Chinese Ba-construction; Imagery schema; Cognitive linguistics.

1. Introduction

The Chinese Ba-construction (hereinafter referred to as “Ba-construction”) is a typical sentence pattern in modern Chinese. It is also a particular sentence pattern not found in English, Japanese, Russian and other languages. The study of the Ba-construction in modern Chinese has lasted over 80 years. As far as the semantic research of the Ba-construction is concerned, the academic research has gradually expanded from “disposal theory” [1], “changeable theory” [2], “cause theory” [3], “subjective disposal theory” [4] and “control theory” [5], which reflects people’s deepening cognition of the Ba-construction. Regarding cognitive linguistics, some scholars have studied the Ba-construction with the theory of cognitive linguistics. For example, Zhang Bojiang [1] and Zhang Wangxi [2] successively put forward the use of displacement schema to analyze the semantics of the Ba-construction. After that, Gao Liqun verified the cognitive mechanism of the spatial displacement schema of Ba-construction by a vocabulary recognition test. Xia Xiuwen uses the principle of distance iconicity in cognitive linguistics to analyze the difference between the cognitive conditions of Ba-construction and the “subject-verb-object” sentence [6]. Hu Wenzhe, on the other hand, points out from the perspective of cognitive grammar that there is a continuum from the typical expression of the meaning of “causing results” to the atypical expression in Ba-construction [7]. Zhao Yan analyzes Ba-construction’s path, balance, and container schema from the philosophical view of cognitive metaphor [8]. Song Huanjie and others investigated the metaphorical extension connection of use cases between members and within members of the Ba family construction from the perspective of cognitive metaphor [9].

Generally speaking, although there are many research works on Ba-construction in academic circles, there are some deficiencies in explaining many special Ba-construction and their covariant laws. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, there is little research on the Ba-construction and even fewer research results from the image schema theory of cognitive linguistics. The existing research on the image schema of Ba-construction mostly starts from a particular category of image schema. It makes a cognitive analysis but lacks a comprehensive and systematic analysis from the overall perspective of the image schema theory of Ba-construction.

The semantic analysis of Ba-construction from the perspective of cognitive linguistics can not only deepen the understanding and understanding of Ba-construction but also profoundly analyze the psychological motivation behind the use of Ba-construction and enrich the research perspective of Ba-construction. Therefore, based on the research results at home and abroad, this paper mainly uses

cognitive linguistics theory to explore the image schema types of Ba-construction, divided into displacement schema, container schema, balance schema and circumferential coverage schema. Based on comprehensive analysis, the contextual conditions of Ba-construction are investigated to deepen the understanding of the characteristics of Ba-construction.

2. Overview of imagery schema theory

Imagery schema in cognitive linguistics is a cognitive organizational structure. This structure is based on the cognition of the primary relationship between things and is often used to understand and recognize more complex concepts[10]. Johnson divides image schema into 28 categories, including container schema, path schema, balance schema, etc. [11]. Lakoff supplements the top-bottom and front-back schema[12]. Although these classifications are different, they all regard container schema, path schema and balance schema as the most common and basic schema types. Based on the above research, domestic researchers combined the characteristics of the Ba-construction and analyzed the Ba-construction using the coverage schema[13]. Based on the classification of the above scholars and the research practice of Ba-construction, this paper divides Ba-construction into displacement schema, container schema, balance schema and circumferential coverage schema from the perspective of image schema and makes further analysis and discussion.

3. Imagery Schema Analysis of Ba-Construction Based on Cognitive Perspective

3.1. Displacement schema

Displacement schema originates from the fundamental perception mode of human body experience, which refers to the displacement change mode of things from one side to another in space or time. The displacement schema of Ba-construction not only refers to the displacement of objects in physical space but also extends to the displacement of psychological space, time and state change through metaphor, constituting a complete schema of Ba-construction in the process of spatial displacement.

3.1.1 Displacement of physical space

The displacement of physical space is the most common and typical structural form of Ba-construction, which refers to the physical space movement of objects under the action of external forces. Such as:

- (1) Taishan water bearer carries dozens of pounds of water from the foot of the mountain to the top bit by bit.
- (2) She put the book in the bookcase.
- (3) The police escorted the prisoner from the scene to the police station.

In the above examples, the water moved from “the foot of the mountain” to “the top of the mountain”, the book moved from “outside the bookcase” to “inside the bookcase”, and the prisoner moved from “scene” to “police station”, all of which were caused by external forces.

Objects that have spatial displacement can be concrete or abstract. When the displaced object is abstract, it can be placed in the physical space of people or other entities, and people or other objects are regarded as the end point of displacement, such as:

- (4) Everyone focused their angry gaze on him.

In example (4), the “gaze” is abstract but can be moved to specific people.

3.1.2 Displacement of psychological space

The displacement of mental space refers to the movement of abstract objects from physical space (or mental space) to people’s mental space under the action of external forces. Such as:

(5) Tree growers have always put the awareness of protecting the environment in an important position.

(6) Keep this experience and lesson firmly in mind.

Example (5) puts “awareness” in an “important position”, and example (6) keeps “experience and lesson” firmly in mind. These two examples belong to the displacement of abstract objects in psychological space, which is the result of the displacement of physical space mapped to psychological space through metaphor.

3.1.3 Displacement of time

People’s expression of time is mainly produced by metaphor and metonymy based on spatial displacement trajectory. The spatial displacement schema of the Ba- construction is mapped to the time category, which forms the image schema with the meaning of “time displacement”. “Time displacement” refers to the movement of an object from one-time point (segment) to another time point (segment) under the action of external force, which can be divided into point-point displacement schema and segment-segment displacement schema, such as:

(7) She finally set her eyes on my face.

(8) Teacher Wang changed this week’s math class to next week.

(9) They think ahead of everything that may happen and never let go of doubt.

In example (7), the “eyes” stayed for a short time, but this action was fixed when it stayed and was a point-to-point displacement pattern. Example (8) indicates that this week’s time action will be postponed next week, and example (9) now considers what will happen in the future: transferring the actions that occurred in a certain period to another time. The above examples are all the results of the displacement of physical space mapped to the field of time category through metaphor.

3.1.4 Displacement of state change

The displacement of state change refers to transforming an object from one state to another under external force. This change process is similar to the spatial displacement process and is a variant form of spatial displacement. This kind of Ba- construction is also more natural and typical. Such as:

(10) You should arouse enthusiasm for learning.

(11) Fasten the seat belt more tightly when riding.

(12) Running five thousand meters made him sweat.

(13) His delay in coming home is driving his family crazy.

(14) The child broke the bowl again.

(15) The sudden change shattered his fantasy.

Examples (10) and (11) are the displacement changes of the physical state imposed by the Ba- construction on things. Examples (12) and (13) are the displacement changes of the physical and psychological state. Example (14) is the change of object shape from “intact bowl” to “broken bowl”. The destruction and shedding of such objects can also be mapped into psychological and emotional destruction through metaphor, as shown in Example (15).

The above analysis of the Ba- construction displacement schema shows that different displacement image schemas extend the Ba- construction from the “disposal meaning”. Although the types of displacement schemes are different, they all have a typical cognitive structure. They emphasize an object’s displacement process under some external force. In addition, Chen Zhong pointed out that “the early Ba- construction were all related to the displacement caused by the movement of the hand, which is also the part related to the physical experience that human beings first perceived” [14]. In other words, the disposal meaning contained in the Ba- construction is derived from the instrumentality of early hands. Therefore, compared with other schemas, the Ba- construction of displacement schema is more common and is the most basic schema type of Ba- construction. Based on displacement schema, the Ba- construction has further derived container schema, balance schema and other types.

3.2. Container schema

Any physical space with or can think of as boundaries is a container. For example, the human body is a “container” divided into internal and external parts. We constantly ingest external substances (air, water, etc.) into this container and constantly discharge the things in the body to the outside (sweat, exhaled gas, etc.), forming a cyclic system. The container schema of the Ba-construction is also divided into inside and outside, which mainly refers to the changing process of things moving between inside and outside the container. According to this process, the container schema of Ba-construction can be divided into container “entry” schema and container “discharge” schema. It should be emphasized that the Ba-construction is dispositive, and its disposal object is usually external things, and the sentence object is mostly containers.

3.2.1 In-container schema

Under the in-container schema, external things can entirely or partially enter the schema. Such as:

(16)The waiter hurriedly welcomed the guests into the private room.

(17)She devoted all her energy to charity.

(18)Li Ming added some more rice to the bowl.

(19)I want to hold my destiny firmly in my own hands.

In example (16), “Welcome the guests into the private room” describes the process from outside to inside when entering the container. As a relatively closed container, a “private room” makes objects (guests) enter it entirely. Example (17) Metaphors the abstract “energy” as an entity and makes it enter the container of “charity”. The “bowl” in example (18) is a semi-open container, and the rice entering the “bowl” is not all but part, so the “rice” is partially contained in the container. In example (19), the “destiny” is virtual, so it is impossible for people to “hold” the virtual object in their hands, and the “hand” is an open container. As a virtual object, fate cannot be grasped entirely by people but only partially entered, so the whole sentence is a process of virtual entry.

3.2.2 Out-container schema

The out-container schema mainly refers to the result of the change of things entirely or partially from the inside out. Such as:

(20)He reluctantly took the passbook out of the safe.

(21)She moved away quietly.

(22) Chef Wang’s good craftsmanship virtually took away half of the customers in the opposite restaurant.

(23)I want to discuss these feelings with someone who knows.

Examples (20) and (21) are entirely out of the container. (20) The action of the middle hand takes all the load (passbook) out of the container (safe) from the inside out. (21) The word “home” is abstract, but the objects that can be removed are specific furniture and furnishings in the home. Examples (22) and (23) are all partial discharges of containers because both “customers” and “feelings” are partial discharges to some extent.

From the above analysis, it can be seen that the in and out of the Ba-construction container schema are either one or the other, and the objects that enter the container cannot be discharged by the container simultaneously. At the same time, whether the in or out of the container, people usually take the container as the background and things as the graphics. Because the independence of things is poor, they need to depend on the inclusion relationship of containers[14].

3.3. Balance schema

Balance schema refers to the state that things are in balance with each other, which is composed of an entity and a balanced relationship. It explains the balanced relationship between the source and target domains [12]. Among them, the entity and the object represent the source domain and the target domain of metaphor mapping, respectively, and the entity and the object should maintain this balanced relationship. The sentence pattern of Ba-construction in balance schema is mostly “take A

as/as B”, which can make people identify with A and B psychologically first, thus narrowing the conceptual distance between A and B. According to whether the two entities in the balanced relationship are entirely equal, they can be divided into absolute balance schema and relative balance schema.

3.3.1 Absolute balance schema

The complete balance schema of Ba-construction refers to two concepts at both ends of the balanced relationship, which are entirely or nearly equal in meaning. Compared with the relative balance schema, its meaning is more explicit. Such as:

(24) Give admission tickets to the music festival as a reward for employees.

(25) My Grandma selected several small gardens as greenhouses.

(26) Many young people regard marriage as a serious occupation.

(27) The local government regards promoting the employment of college students as a long-term strategy.

Example (24) uses “as” to connect the two meaningful concepts before and after. The reward is the admission ticket, and “reward” and “admission ticket” are equivalent. Example (25) uses the phrase “selected...as...” to indicate the balanced relationship between the two concepts, which highlights that the balanced state of the event is fixed after the change. Examples (26) and (27) The concepts of the two ends of the balanced related words are not equal in the superficial sense. However, they achieve a balanced relationship through the metaphor of connotation. From the ideographic point of view, “marriage” and “occupation” in (27) cannot be understood equally, but here we put them at the two ends of the balanced relationship by metaphor. The two concepts have an approximate correlation. Marriage, like work, has become something people must do. Example (28) regards “promoting employment” as a “strategy” and makes the characteristics of “promoting college students’ employment” as long-term and arduous as war through metaphor.

3.3.2 Relative balance schema

The relative balance schema of Ba-construction refers to relatively similar concepts of two ends in a balanced relationship under a specific condition. Such as:

(28) Writing will become very easy when you take writing as a habit.

(29) His words were not credible, so everyone took the true story of what he said as a joke and did not take it to heart.

(30) Employees in garment factories regard the newly introduced production equipment as their common “God of Wealth”.

(31) He regards this book as a saviour to help him pass the exam.

In Example (28), different people have different living habits, and whether writing is included varies from person to person. However, under certain conditions, when “writing is regarded as a living habit”, “writing becomes easy” is established. In Example (29), “true story” and “joke” are both conceptual words with practical significance, and they are not equal. However, in the case of “the credibility of what he said is not high”, the “true story” from “he” can be compared with “joke” relatively equal. The “production equipment” in Example (30) cannot be a “god of wealth” when it means meaning, and the “book” in Example (31) cannot be a “saviour”. In these two examples, the semantics of the two words connected by “as” and the meaning of the two words are not consistent. However, they are somewhat similar, so concept one can be projected to concept two, and the structure has a relatively balanced relationship.

Through the above analysis, it can be concluded that the Ba-construction in the balanced schema can only show disposability under certain conditions. Hence, its disposability is weaker than other schemas, which is also its typical feature.

3.4. Circumferential coverage schema

The three imagery schemas discussed above can cover most of the Ba-construction, but in practice, some special Ba-construction will not subordinate to the above schemas. The semantics of this kind

of sentence is also dispositive, but it is different from other sentences in that it is “comprehensive”. The Circumferential coverage schema of Ba-construction means that one object exerts some kind of treatment on another object through external force. After the completion of the application, it forms a complete and peripheral coverage and mastery of the affected object, such as:

(33) I have visited all the streets.

(34) She thought over her mother’s words from beginning to end.

(34) The volunteers made a thorough action plan for giving love.

Example (33) is different from the sentence analyzed before. The “visit” does not exert any influence on the “street” but emphasizes the circumferential coverage of the “street” by the action of “stroll”. “From beginning to end” in Example (34) embodies the comprehensive coverage of “think” to “mother’s words”. In example (35), the adjective “thorough” is used to reflect the image of the action “make” covering “plan”.

It can be seen that the “circumferential coverage” is also a typical feature of the Ba-construction. By applying actions, the imagery metaphor of the object is extended from the physical to the psychological space, thus highlighting the imagery schema of the Ba-construction.

From the above analysis, we can see that the displacement schema, container schema, balance schema and circumferential coverage schema of Ba-construction are not unrelated. However, they are different in form and semantic features, and they all belong to the broad category of image schema of Ba-construction.

4. Conclusions

From the perspective of imagery schema theory in cognitive linguistics, this paper makes a detailed analysis of the categories of Ba-construction from four aspects: displacement schema, container schema, balance schema and circumferential coverage schema, and further decomposes them according to different sentence semantics, to make the classification of Ba-construction more detailed and specific. First of all, in different contexts, the Ba-construction can expand the perception of the physical world to different fields such as psychology, time and state through metaphor so that these abstract fields can also have the characteristics of the Ba-construction, thus enriching the semantics and image schema of the Ba-construction. Secondly, regarding semantic disposability, displacement schema is the strongest, and variant schema is the most numerous and typical. The “disposal meaning” of the circumferential coverage schema is relatively weak; The container and balance schema are centred. Finally, the study of Ba-construction from the perspective of image schema is conducive to a deeper understanding of Ba-construction and the overall understanding of other Chinese sentence patterns and comprehensive induction.

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