A Comparative Study on Unmarked Adjectival Predication and Boundedness in Modern Mandarin and Classic Chinese

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Abstract: Conceptualization according to boundedness and unboundedness is a universal characteristic of human cognition. By a comparative analysis on unmarked adjectival predication in modern Mandarin and classic Chinese, this paper aims to investigate the boundedness of adjectival predication from a historical perspective. It is revealed that in classic Chinese unmarked adjectival-predicates were more complicated, and adjectives were able to function as predicates much more freely without the support of functional elements. It is also worth noting that the unmarked adjectival predication in modern Chinese are are actually boundarized at the context level from pragmatic perspective. In addition, corpus data and statistic analysis are also used to examine the changes of unmarked adjectival-predicates in different historical period. It can be clearly seen that the use of unmarked adjectival-predicates began to decline in the middle ancient times, then decreased continuously in Song and Yuan Dynasties, and become very restricted and rare in Ming and Qing Dynasties.

Keywords: Unmarked adjectival predication, Comparative analysis, Boundedness.

1. Introduction

The dichotomy between boundedness and unboundedness is a pervasive characteristic of human cognition (Langacker 1987: 486; Paradis 2001). Since there is correspondence between conceptual structure and linguistic structure, the opposition between bounded and unbounded of property in degree of intensity or quantity is manifested by the fact that qualitative adjectives is continuous and unbounded, thus can’t be used directly as predicate without the support of functional elements. In modern Mandarin, it is often necessary to add various markers to make the sentence complete and acceptable, e.g., intensifiers, degree complement, comparative components, aspect marker le, quantitative phrases, and the reduplication of qualitative adjectives, etc. Obviously, the adjectival predication in modern Mandarin is characterized by boundedness (Lu 1988: 172-186; Shen 1995).

The unmarked adjectival predication in this paper refers to the sentences in which adjectives are used as predicates in bare form, without supporting markers. Obviously, the unmarked form of adjectival predication is at variance with the characteristic of boundedness. However, unmarked adjectival-predicates are observed to exist not only in classic Chinese, but also in modern Mandarin.

Previous studies have discussed adjectival-predicate marking and boundedness in modern Mandarin (Huang 1994; He 1994; Shen 1999; Grano 2012; Pang 2015; Xiong & Yang 2020), and too little attention is focused on the unmarked form of adjectival predication, especially from the diachronic perspective. By comparing unmarked adjectival predication in classic Chinese and modern Mandarin, it is found that the adjectival-predicates in unmarked form is far more free and complicated in classic Chinese, while unmarked adjectival-predicates in modern Mandarin is rather restricted. However, it is worth noting that these syntactic independent forms in modern Mandarin are actually boundarized via the context. In addition, based on diachronic corpus data and statistic analysis, it is shown that adjectival-predicate in bare form was acceptable and quite common in Old Chinese, but from the middle ancient times, this use began to show a significant downward trend, and in the Ming and Qing dynasties, adjectives were rarely used independently as sentence predicate.

2. Unmarked Adjectival Predication in Modern Mandarin

In modern Mandarin, adjectives can function as predicate independently generally when they are used in contrastive construction or interlocution contexts. But in fact, unmarked adjectival predication in modern Mandarin is more complicated than we thought, as illustrated below.

2.1. Contrastive construction

The adjectives appearing in contrastive construction are always in an antonymous relationship, expressing a contrastive meaning, as exemplified by (1)-(2). Since comparison is also an important embodiment of adjective gradability (The boundedness of adjectives is associated with gradability, which is manifested through comparison and modification by intensifiers (Quirk et al 1985: 435; Paradis 2001). ) (Doetjes 2008: 123-155), thus unbounded properties can also be discretized and bounderized in the contrastive context.

(1)人小心不小。 (modern Mandarin)
Ren xiao xin bu xiao.
People small mind NEG small
“He is young, but very insightful.”

(2)北方干燥，南方潮湿。 (modern Mandarin)
2.2. Interlocution contexts

In example (3)-(4), I am stupid/he is tall means I’m more stupid/I’m taller than the others, and the contrastive meaning is shown through the context, thus highlights the gradability of qualitative adjectives.

(3) A: Who’s stupid?
   B: I’m stupid.
(4) A: Who’s taller, you or he?
   B: I’m taller.

2.3. Parallel construction

The structure of parallel construction is similar to contrastive construction, but adjectives occurring in contrastive construction are always in an antonymous relationship, while in parallel construction there is a set of adjectives with similar or related meanings. Two basic types of parallel construction are distinguished here. The first type, as in (5), takes the form S + A1 + A2 + A3. Obviously, there’s only one subject in the sentence, not involving in part-whole relationship. Zhu (1956) distinguishes two adjectival classes for Chinese: the base forms, the expression of a quality, and the complex forms, the description of the state or mood of that quality. The class of complex forms covers a range of subclasses, including reduplicated adjectives (e.g., da-da ‘big-big’, gao-gao-xing-xing ‘happy-happy’, malimahu ‘careless’; heihuhu ‘black’), modifier-head compound adjectives (bijingliang ‘ice-cold’, xuebaizhi ‘snow-white’), and adjectival phrases. As for the adjectival phrases, it also has two subclasses, one is composed of an adverb and an adjective (hen xiao ‘very small’), feichang ganjing ‘extremely clean’), and the other is composed of juxtaposed adjectives (e.g., you gao you da ‘tall and strong’). Although it is extremely puzzling to see adjectival phrases figuring among the complex forms, it is indeed share some similar syntactic and semantic characteristics with state adjectives (Waltraud 2006). Obviously, S + A1 + A2 + A3 can be seen as a subtype of juxtaposed-adjective phrases. Zhu (1956) proposes that although juxtaposed-adjective phrases simply present a set of properties and do not directly indicate a quality or degree point, they actually convey emphasis, implying an intensive meaning. On the basis of discussions above, it’s obvious that, on the one hand, just like the state adjectives, S + A1 + A2 + A3 describes the state or mood of the quality belonging to S; on the other hand, a set of juxtaposed adjectives can also add intensive meaning to the sentence, indicating gradability by calibrating a property in high degree of intensity, making continuous property bounded.

2.4. Complex sentences

As in (7)-(8), the unmarked adjectival-predicates are also found in various complex sentences, such as concessive complex sentence, selective complex sentence, hypothetical complex sentence, causal complex sentence, conditional complex sentence, progressive complex sentence, and coordinate complex sentence. Concessive and selective complex sentence convey a contrastive meaning, and boundarization is achieved by making comparisons. In hypothetical, causal and conditional complex sentences, adjectival-predicate behaves as the reason or condition for the occurrence of another event, thus highlights the intensity of property, or implies a contrastive meaning via the context clues. Correspondingly, in the progressive complex sentence, and coordinate complex sentence, intensive meaning is also expressed by coordination of adjectives with similar or related meanings.

(5) Ren piaoliang, jiashi hao, xingge bucuo.
   person beautiful family background good personality good
   “She is beautiful, has a good family background and a good personality.”

(6) Ni piaoliang, congming, huopo, ke-ai, you shangjinxin.
   you beautiful smart lively cute have motivation
   “You are beautiful, smart, lively, cute and motivated.”

The second type, as in (6), take the form S + A1 + A2 + A3. Obviously, there’s only one subject in the sentence, not involving in part-whole relationship. Zhu (1956) distinguishes two adjectival classes for Chinese: the base forms, the expression of a quality, and the complex forms, the description of the state or mood of that quality. The class of complex forms covers a range of subclasses, including reduplicated adjectives (e.g., da-da ‘big-big’, gao-gao-xing-xing ‘happy-happy’, malimahu ‘careless’; heihuhu ‘black’), modifier-head compound adjectives (bijingliang ‘ice-cold’, xuebaizhi ‘snow-white’), and adjectival phrases. As for the adjectival phrases, it also has two subclasses, one is composed of an adverb and an adjective (hen xiao ‘very small’), feichang ganjing ‘extremely clean’), and the other is composed of juxtaposed adjectives (e.g., you gao you da ‘tall and strong’). Although it is extremely puzzling to see adjectival phrases figuring among the complex forms, it is indeed share some similar syntactic and semantic characteristics with state adjectives (Waltraud 2006). Obviously, S + A1 + A2 + A3 can be seen as a subtype of juxtaposed-adjective phrases. Zhu (1956) proposes that although juxtaposed-adjective phrases simply present a set of properties and do not directly indicate a quality or degree point, they actually convey emphasis, implying an intensive meaning. On the basis of discussions above, it’s obvious that, on the one hand, just like the state adjectives, S + A1 + A2 + A3 describes the state or mood of the quality belonging to S; on the other hand, a set of juxtaposed adjectives can also add intensive meaning to the sentence, indicating gradability by calibrating a property in high degree of intensity, making continuous property bounded.

(7) If you are tired, you don’t have to stay with me.
(8) Because it is summer, long-sleeved clothes are processed, so it is cheap.

(5) Ren piaoliang, jiashi hao, xingge bucuo.
   person beautiful family background good personality good
   “She is beautiful, has a good family background and a good personality.”

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feature of $S_1+S_2+A$ is that $S_1$ is the whole, and $S_2$ is a part, possessed by $S_1$, and adjectival predicates describe the property of $S_1$, which allows a bare form (example 11-12).

(11) 她眼睛大。（modern Mandarin）

他眼睛大。

（12）他个子矮，身体胖。（Yingchun hua, modern Mandarin）

他个子矮，身体胖。

Because the adjectival predicate denotes the quality or property of $S_{lattice}$ rather than $S_{frame}$, and $S_{lattice}$ is also a part of $S_{frame}$, double comparisons are made here: the first one is made between $S_{lattice}$ and other components of $S_{frame}$, as is shown in (11), her eyes are large, in which large refers specifically to the eyes, forming a contrast with the non-eye parts; the second comparison is made between the $S_{frame}$ in the sentence and other types of $S_{frame}$, also as in (11), her eyes are large, in which her eyes specifically refers to hers, rather than others. Therefore, double-subject construction is also characterized by gradability. Although adjectival predicate is unmarked, in fact it has been bounded by contrastive meaning implied in the context clues.

In summary, the unmarked form of adjectival-predicate in modern Chinese mainly occur in contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction, complex sentences and double-subject construction. How we perceive the world often has corresponding expression in language, so the opposition between bounded and unbounded makes us use various means to realize the boundedness of language expression. Boundedness is a very important characteristic of adjectival predication in modern Mandarin, so the existence of above unmarked forms are extremely special and rather limited. Previous studies mainly focus on explicit sentence-completing elements in modern Mandarin. However, some implicit strategies can be used as well to help adjectival-predicate achieve boundedness. Liu (2007) proposes that pragmatic contrasts can provide exterior connections for originally unbounded objects, by which the boundary of the gestalt structure can be identified. According to the analysis above, the gradability of adjectives can often be shown through various strategies on the context level. It is found that although adjectives can behave as predicate independently in these constructions above, a contrastive meaning or an intensive meaning can be obtained from the context and these unmarked form are actually bounded from pragmatic perspective.

3. Unmarked Adjectival Predication in Classic Chinese

The unmarked adjectival-predicates in classic Chinese can occur in simple sentences, logical relation sentences, contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction and double-subject construction. In order to further examine the differences of unmarked adjectival predication between classic and modern Chinese, we also translate them into modern Chinese while citing relevant
examples of classic Chinese.

3.1. Simple sentences

3.1.1. Descriptive simple sentence
Adjectives can function as predicate independently in simple sentences, describing a quality of the thing named, which is the most notable difference between classic Chinese and modern Mandarin, as exemplified by (13) - (15). This type of unmarked adjectival-predicate is very common in the Pre-Qin period and Middle Chinese, however, its use frequency decreased rapidly since Song and Yuan Dynasties, and almost disappeared in the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

(13)a. 其庭小。（Zuozhuan, Zhaogong shiba nian, 500BC）
Qi ting xiao.
PRON courtyard small
“Its courtyard is small.”
b. 庭院很小。（Modern Mandarin）
Tingyuan hen xiao.
courtyard very small
“The courtyard is very small.”
(14)a. 其车美。（Zuozhuan, Xianggong er shi qi nian, 500BC）
Qi che mei.
PRON chariot gorgeous
“His chariot is gorgeous.”
b. 他的马车非常华丽。（Modern Mandarin）
Ta de mache feichang huali.
he his chariot very gorgeous
“His chariot is very gorgeous.”
(15)a. 亡失者多。（《抱朴子·钧世》）
Wang shi - zhe duo.
lost - books many
“Many ancient books are lost.”
b. 丢失的古书很多。（现代汉语）
Diushi de gu shu hen duo.
lost GEN ancient book very many
“So many ancient books are lost.”

As is shown in (13a)-(15a), since adjectives occur in simple sentences, which are relatively self-sufficient and independent, and also adjectival-predicates take the bare from, we can hardly obtain an intensive meaning or contrastive meaning from the context. Therefore, with the establishment of boundedness of adjectival predication, it is more likely that functional elements, usually degree word, are added to make the sentence bounded, otherwise, the sentence is incomplete and unacceptable, as is illustrated in (13b) - (15b).

3.1.2. Judgmental simple sentence
In Old and Middle Chinese, a bare form of adjectival predicate, namely S+A, can also conveys a judgmental sense, as exemplified by (16a) - (17a).

(16)a. 白狗黑。（Zhuangzi, Tianxia, 3rd BC）
Bai gou hei.
white dog black
“A white dog is black.”
b. 白狗是黑的。（现代汉语）
Bai gou shi hei de.
white dog COP black NOM
“A white dog is black.”
(17)a. 面白。（Sou shen ji, Chapter 6, 4th AD）
Mian bai.
face white
“The face is white.”
b. 脸是白的。（现代汉语）
Lian shi bai de.
face COP white NOM
“The face is white.”

However, with the grammaticalization of copula shi ‘be’, shi+A began to function as predicate since Middle Chinese (example 18), and meanwhile, S+A expressing a judgmental meaning gradually disappeared. In modern Mandarin, judgmental adjective predication typically take the form shi+A+de, and unbounded properties can also be discretized and boundedvia de, as exemplified by (16b) and (17b).

(18) 风月是同。（Quanliangwen, Jindaishu, 6th AD）
Feng yue shi tong.
wind moon COP same
“Wind and Moon are the same.”

3.2. Logical relation sentences
In logical relation sentences, different meanings are expressed through different logical relationships contained in the sentence, for example: concession, selection, causality, condition, hypothesis, progress and coordination. Logical relation sentences include not only complex sentences (example 19, 20, 23, 24, 26), but also contraction sentences (example 21, 22) and serial-verb construction (example 25). Contraction sentence is a very special pattern in Chinese, which takes the form of simple sentence, but expresses different logical meanings as complex sentence. Serial-verb construction describes events that occur successively in chronological or logical order, implying a dynamic meaning. In (19-23), the logical relationships are overt, where a conjunction is present. The link word in (24-26) is absent, however, logical meanings still can be clearly obtained.

(19)a. 虽大，轻也。（Zuozhuan, Xianggong san nian, 500BC）
Sui da, qing ye.
although large light Prt.
“Although the tripod is large, it is very light.”
b. 虽然鼎很大，但很轻。（现代汉语）
Suiran ding hen da, dan hen qing.
although tripod very large but very light
“Although the tripod is very large, it is very light.”
(20)a. 贾季乱，且罪大。（Zuozhuan, wengong shi san nian, 500BC）
Jiaji luan, qie zui da.
Jiaji troubled and misconduct big

“Jiaji likes to go against the emperor and make troubles, and what he does is very bad.”

b. 贾季喜欢作乱，而且罪行十分严重。 (modern Mandarin)
Jiaji xihuan zuoluan, erqie zuixing shifen yanzhong.
Jiaji like make troubles and misconduct extremely bad

“Jiaji likes to go against the emperor and make troubles, and what he does is very bad.”

Shequan) sped in without telling the other two people.

Chariot drive close Chu camp Wan Shequan NEG tell
c.

“(He) was hungry, sleepy, and about to die.”

b. 饥饿困乏，快要死去。 (modern Mandarin)
Ji-e kunfa, kuaiyao si qu.
hungry sleepy soon die go

“(He) was hungry, sleepy, and about to die.”

The chariot was approaching the Chu camp, and (Wan Shequan) sped in without telling the other two people.

b. 车子驶近楚营，宛射犬没有告诉这两个人就疾驰而进。
Chezi shi jin chu ying, Wan Shequan NEG tell

“The chariot was approaching the Chu camp, and (Wan Shequan) sped in without telling the other two people.”

state of Qi too powerful NEG I partner Prt
“The state of Qi is too powerful to be a partner in marriage.”

齐国太大，不是和我相匹配的配偶。 (modern Mandarin)
Qiguo tai qiangda, bu shi wo xiangpipei de peiou.
state of Qi too powerful NEG COP with me matched GEN partner

“The state of Qi is too powerful to be a partner in marriage.”

In classic Chinese, generally, adjectives can appear in predicate independently and freely in different types of complex sentences, contraction sentences and serial-verb construction. There is a transitional relationship in (19), a coordinated relationship in (20), a progressive relationship in (21), a continuing relationship in (22-25) and a causal relationship in (26), respectively. Although this unmarked form is also occasionally seen in the complex sentences in modern Mandarin, as illustrated in 2.4, but it is shown a strong inclination to marked form. This contrast can be seen from sentences of classic Chinese and their translations in modern Mandarin, with extra bounding markers added in (19b), (20b), (21), a continuing relationship in (22-25) and a causal relationship in (26), respectively. Although this unmarked form is also occasionally seen in the complex sentences in modern Mandarin, as illustrated in 2.4, but it is shown a strong inclination to marked form. This contrast can be seen from sentences of classic Chinese and their translations in modern Mandarin, with extra bounding markers added in (19b), (20b), (22b), (23b), (24b) and (26b).

3.3. Contrastive construction

As in modern Mandarin, unmarked adjectival predicate can also occur in contrastive constructions in classic Chinese. Antonymous adjectives can either be used together in the same sentence, or appear in separate clauses (example 27-28).

“shoes are cheap, and prosthetic legs are expensive.”

b. 鞋子贱，假腿贵。 (modern Mandarin)
Xiezi jian, jiaotui gui.
shoe cheap prosthetic-legs expensive

“shoes are cheap, and prosthetic legs are expensive.”

state of wei great state of Lu small
“Wei suffered a great calamity, while Lu suffered a small one.”

b. 魏国遭受的灾祸大，鲁国遭受的灾祸小。（modern Mandarin）

Wei guo zaoshou de zaihuo da Luguo zaoshou de zaihuo xiao
state of wei suffer GEN calamity great state of Lu suffer GEN calamity small
“Wei suffered a great calamity, while Lu suffered a small one.”

3.4. Interlocution contexts

Unmarked adjectival predicates used in interlocution contexts are very common in both classic and modern Chinese. Here are some examples in classic Chinese:


Ren ren you wen Wuluzi yue: “Li yu shi shu zhong?”
Yue: “Li zhong.”
state of Ren people have ask Wuluzi say courtesy and food which important say courtesy important
One person from the state of Ren asked Wuluzi: “Which is more important, courtesy or food?” Wuluzi answered: “Courtesly is more important.”
b.有一位任国人问屋庐子说: “礼和食哪个重要?”答曰: “礼重要。”(modern Mandarin)

You yi-wei ren zuo ren wen Wuluzi shuo: “Li he shi shu zhong?”
Zhe: “Li zhong.”
have one-CL state of Ren people ask Wuluzi say courtesy and food which important answer courtesy important
One person from the state of Ren asked Wuluzi: “Which is more important, courtesy or food?” Wuluzi answered: “Courtesly is more important.”

(30)a.君主贤明，世道太平。(modern Mandarin)

Junzhu xianming, shidao taiping.
monarch wise world peaceful

(31)a.君主贤治。(Lvshi chunqiu, guanshi, 3rd BC)

Zhu xianming, shidao taiping.
monarch wise world peaceful

(32)a.如今我身材高大魁梧,面目英俊美好。（modern Mandarin）

Jin chang da kuai wu, meng ru yi jun meihao.
now tall sturdy handsome good

(33)a.发白者黑，齿落者生。（Baopuzi, Jindan, AD 325）

Fa bai hei, chui luo zhe sheng.

(34)a.发白者黑，齿落者生。（Baopuzi, Jindan, AD 325）

Fa bai hei, chui luo zhe sheng.

3.5. Parallel contexts

In parallel construction, adjectives can either be used together in the same sentence, or appear in separate co-ordinated clauses, similar in meaning and grammatical form.

In modern Chinese, the parallel construction is often in the form of S0 + (S1 + A1) + (S2 + A2) + (S3 + A3) +… and S+A1+A2+A3, while those in the classic Chinese is much more various and complicated. As is shown in (33), adjectives can co-ordinated with verbs, used as predicate together. And in (34), one sentence is paralleled by another one, showing a similarity of grammatical structure, with similar or related meaning between sentences.

(31)a.君主世治。（Lvshi chunqiu, guanshi, 3rd BC）

Zhu xianming, shidao taiping.
monarch wise world peaceful

(32)a.今长大美好。（Zhuangzi, Daozhi, 3rd BC）

Jin chang da mei hao.
now tall sturdy handsome good

(33)a.发白者黑，齿落者生。（Baopuzi, Jindan, AD 325）

Fa bai hei, chui luo zhe sheng.

(34)a.得之者贵，未得之者贱。（Baopuzi, Changxuan, AD 325）

De zhi zhe gui, bu dai Huangyue zhi wei.

De zhi zhe

fù, bu xu nande zhi huo.

grasp it those exalted NEG need Huangyue GEN
power learn it those
rich NEG need valuable GEN asset

“Those who have mastered the Dao will be very noble, and they don’t need to borrow the prestige of Huangyue. People who understand the Dao will be very rich without relying on valuable assets.”

b.掌握了玄道的人会非常显贵，不必借用黄钺的威风。
体会到玄道的人会特别富有，无需凭借贵重的资财。
(modern Mandarin)

Zhang wo le xuan dao de ren hui feichang xiangui, bu bi jie yong Huangyue de weifeng. Ti hui dao xuan dao de ren hui tebie fuyou, wu xu pingjie guizhong de ziaci.

grasp Asp. Dao GEN people will extremely exalted NEG need depend on Huangyue GEN power learn Asp. Dao GEN people will very rich NEG need rely on valuable GEN asset.

“Those who have mastered the Dao will be very noble, and they don’t need to borrow the prestige of Huangyue. People who understand the Dao will be very rich without relying on valuable assets.”

3.6. Double-subject constructions

Double-subject construction is also a common form of unmarked adjectival-predicates in classic Chinese, and the semantic and syntactic features are almost the same with modern Mandarin. Here are some examples of double-subject construction in classic Chinese:

| (35)a.今吾才小。 (Zhuangzi, Gengsangchu, 3rd BC) | Jin wu cai xiao. now I talent little |
| “Now I have very little talent.” | “Lin Chuan has a noble reputation.” |
| (36)a.临川誉贵。 (Shi shuo xin yu, Pinzao, AD 450) | Linchuan yu gui. Linchuan reputation noble. |
| “Lin Chuan has a noble reputation.” | “Lin Chuan has a noble reputation.” |

3.7. The use frequency of unmarked adjectival-predicates across history

Lunyu, Mengzi of Pre-Qin Period, Baopuzi, Sou Shen Ji of Middle Chinese, Jingde Chuanpeng Lu, Zhuzi Yulei(Vol. 1-30), Xin Kan Yuan Poetry, Laoqida of Song and Yuan Dynasties, Xiyou Ji, Honglou Meng and Ernv Yingxiong Zhuan of Ming and Qing Dynasties are chosen as linguistic research materials to analyze the changes of the unmarked and marked form of adjectival predication in different historical period.

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<th>Table 1. Percentages (and raw figures) of unmarked and marked adjectival-predicates across history</th>
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<td>Jingde Chuanpeng Lu</td>
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<td>Zhuzi Yulei(Vol. 1-30)</td>
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<td>Xin Kan Yuan Poetry</td>
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<td>Laoqida</td>
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<td>Ming &amp; Qing</td>
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<td>Xiyou Ji</td>
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<td>Honglou Meng</td>
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<td>Ernv Yingxiong Zhuan</td>
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By comparing the use of unmarked adjectival-predicates in different historical periods, it can be clearly seen that the frequency of unmarked form has been continuously decreasing from classic Chinese to modern Mandarin. In Lunyu and Mengzi, the representative literature of Old Chinese, the proportion of unmarked adjectival-predicates accounts for 47.7% and 32.1% of the total number of adjectival predicates.

In the Middle Chinese, unmarked adjectival predication began to show a downward trend. The proportion of unmarked adjectival-predicates in Baopuzi is 37.4%, and even lower in Sou Shen Ji, about 30.2% by contrast. The decreasing of unmarked form is generally because that the use frequency of constructions in relation to degree was raised greatly in middle Ancient times, such as adverbdegree+A (e.g., 辛美 shen mei ‘very beautiful’), comparative construction (e.g., 深于大海 shen yu da hai ‘deeper than the sea’) and analogous construction (e.g., 大如山 da ru shan ‘as huge as a mountain’), which further strengthened the gradibility characteristics of adjectives, and thus enhanced the boundedness of adjectival predication.

In Song and Yuan Dynasties, adjectives showed a significant trend of boundarization when behave as predicate, and new marking forms emerged in large numbers, e.g., degree markers and dynamic markers. Correspondingly, a continuous decline is shown in the number of unmarked
Adjectival-predicates, which is much lower than the marked form. Although, the unmarked form is more frequently used in Jingde chuanteng lu(27.5%) and Xin Kan Yuan Poetry(32.6%), in other two books, Zhuzi Yulei (Vol. 1-30) and Laqida, which consist largely of spoken discourse, the proportion of unmarked form in total number of adjectival-predicates is as low as 18.3% and 20.5%, respectively.

As for the Ming and Qing dynasties, different kinds of marked adjectival-predicates were getting unprecedentedly enriched and developed. Correspondingly, in Hongloumeng and Ernv yingxiang zhuan, the proportion of unmarked adjectival-predicates even decreases to 13.5% and 8.7%, forming a striking contrast to the statistics in early period.

4. Conclusion

This paper examines the class of unmarked adjectival-predicates in modern Mandarin and classic Chinese. The unmarked form of adjectival predication in modern Chinese mainly appear in contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction, complex sentences and double-subject construction, while the unmarked form of adjectival predication in classic Chinese mainly appear in simple sentences, logical relation sentences, contrastive construction, interlocution contexts, parallel construction, and double-subject construction. It is obvious that the unmarked adjectival predication in ancient Chinese are richer and more complicated, which are mainly manifested in the following aspects.

Firstly, the unmarked form of adjectival predication in classic Chinese not only cover the subclasses of those in modern Mandarin, but also can appear in simple sentences and different kinds of logical relation sentences. In simple sentences, unmarked adjectival-predicates generally denote properties that we ascribe to entities, or convey a judgemental meaning. However, simple sentences are independent and self-sufficient, in which the gradability or intensity of qualitative adjectives is uncertain. With the development of boundedness, this use gradually disappeared since Song and Yuan dynasties, and become totally unacceptable and ungrammatical in modern Mandarin.

Secondly, although some unmarked form both exist in ancient and modern Chinese, their use frequency and use range in modern Mandarin is incomparable to classic Chinese. Adjectives can function as predicate far more independently and freely, especially in Old and Middle Chinese. Even in the Song and Yuan dynasties, boundedness still was not a obligatory requirement for adjectival predication, and various markers were added just owing to the semantic need. By contrast, adjectival predication in modern Mandarin is characterized boundedness. Although adjectives can behave as predicate independently in contrastive construction, dialogue context, etc., a contrastive meaning or an intensive meaning can be clearly obtained from the context, and these unmarked form are actually bounded in some way.

The difference of unmarked adjectival-predicates between classic Chinese and modern Mandarin shows the transition from boundedness to boundedness occurring in Chinese adjectival predication across history. The historical corpus data and statistic analysis are also used to sort out this evolution process. When one is rising, the other is falling. It can be clearly seen that the use of unmarked adjectival-predicate began to decline in the middle ancient times, then decreased continuously in Song and Yuan Dynasties, and become very restricted and rare in Ming and Qing Dynasties.

References

