

# Analysis of the Unbalanced Phenomenon of the Antonyms "More" and "Less"

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**Abstract:** "More" and "Less" are a pair of antonyms that we often use in both spoken and written language. They always appear in pairs, but there are significant differences in the semantic scope, word formation, collocation, and frequency of use between the two, resulting in an imbalance of antonyms. This article mainly analyzes the imbalance phenomenon of this pair of antonyms from the four aspects mentioned above.

**Keywords:** Antonyms; More; Less; Imbalanced.

## 1. Introduction

Huang Borong and Liao Xudong pointed out in the sixth edition of Modern Chinese that there is an imbalance in some antonyms. This article takes "more" and "less" as examples to discuss the imbalance phenomenon of this antonym.

## 2. The Semantic Scope of "More" and "Less" is Imbalanced

### 2.1. The Basic Meaning of "More"

'more', the six books belong to the meaning character. In the "Shuowen Jiezi", the explanation for "more" is: "more, Chong also. Cong, Chong Xi. Xi is the same as Xiang Yi also. Therefore, it is more." In the Qing Dynasty, Wang Guowei believed that "more" refers to a large quantity in ancient Chinese.

In the 7th edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary, "more" has 9 meanings: 1) the number of adjectives is large; 2) the number of verbs exceeds the original or expected number; An increase in the number compared to the original (as opposed to "less") 3) Excessive or unnecessary 4) [ Numerals ] (used after numerals or quantifiers) indicate a slight difference 5) [ adjectives ] indicate a large degree of difference 6) [ interrogative pronouns ] a) used in interrogative sentences, question degree or quantity b) refers to a certain degree. 7) mostly; for the most part 8) [ Adverb ] in exclamation sentences, indicates a high degree 9) surname.

### 2.2. The Basic Meaning of "Less"

"less" is explained in "Shuowen Jiezi" as: "Not much. Muting from a young age." Duan Yucai said in "Shuowen Jiezi Annotations": "Not much, not much means less, not much. Therefore, in ancient time "less" also used as "small" or "little".

In the 7th edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary, "less" (shǎo) There are 6 meanings in total: 1) The number of adjectives is small (opposite to "many", the same as the following 2) 2) The number of verbs is not enough or should be; Missing. 3) [ Verb ] Lost, lost. 4) [ Verb ] owes 5) [ Adverb ] temporarily, slightly 6) [ Adverb ] does not; Do not (often used for commands or commands).

From this, it can be seen that "much" and "little" are

semantically mainly used to indicate the size of the quantity range, and the semantics of "much" and "little" are based on relative quantity range standards to explain the quantity. But "more" has five parts of speech: adjectives, verbs, numerals, pronouns, and adverbs, while "less" only has three parts of speech: adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. The different parts of speech result in different semantic ranges between the two, and the semantic range of "more" is significantly larger than that of "less".

## 3. The Formation of "Many" and "Little" is not Balanced

### 3.1. Unbalanced Number of Word Formation

In the 7th edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary, there are 64 words starting with "many" and 13 words starting with "little", indicating a significant difference in word formation.

As a morpheme, 'more' has the semantic feature of '+large quantity' and has a certain ability to form words. As a morpheme, 'less' has the semantic feature of '+small quantity' and also has a certain ability to form words. But their word-forming abilities are not balanced. For example, "mostly", the index quantity exceeds half or approximately; But we cannot say 'less than half'; Multiple fetuses "refer to three or more fetuses within the same fetus; Three or more people born at the same birth, but cannot be referred to as "oligozoosperms". In "multilateral conferences" and "multilateral trade", "multilateral" refers to the participation of three or more parties, especially three or more countries, corresponding to "unilateral", and cannot be said to be "less sided": "polygon" refers to a figure enclosed by three or more straight lines on the same plane, and there is no such term as "less sided shape". From the above examples, it can be seen that morpheme "many" has stronger word formation ability than morpheme "few".

There are many overlapping words such as 'moremore' and 'lessless', while 'less' does not.

The word-formation of "less" with a predicate complement relationship forms verbs, such as "less cannot" and "less cannot", while "more" does not.

Overall, due to the different word-forming abilities of "more" and "less", there is a significant difference in the number of words formed between the two.

### 3.2. Unbalanced Emotional Color in Word Formation

In addition to the objective meaning of "+large quantity", the words composed of "many" generally contain positive meanings, such as "more benefits the good", "more difficulties prosper the country", "more planning and decision-making", and there are also derogatory words, such as "talkative", "unnecessary", and "suspicious".

The words composed of "less" generally only indicate the objective meaning of "+small quantity", such as "a small amount", "a few", "a little", etc., and there are fewer words with emotional connotations, such as "less seen but more strange", with derogatory meanings, and almost no words with positive meanings.

## 4. Semantic Imbalance after Pairing

### 4.1. The Semantic Changes in the Combination of "More" and "Less" with the Negative Adverb "No" are Not Balanced

As the negative form of 'less', 'many' has a semantic range (quantity range) of 'more'. Mr. Lu Jianming believes that "a lot" contains the additional meaning of "enough". Example: "She bought a lot" means "She bought enough. Because the semantics of 'enough' lean towards 'many', the semantic range of 'many' is close to or partially contained within the semantic range of 'enough'. And 'not much' does not mean 'enough', for example: 'She's not doing good business today, not selling too much' does not mean 'She's doing bad business today, selling too little'.

Therefore, when the two are paired with the negative adverb "bu", the semantic changes are imbalanced.

### 4.2. The Position and Semantics of the Compound Word "More More" and "Less" are Imbalanced When They are Combined into a Biased Compound Word "More More"

(1) Position imbalance. Jia Yaping et al. (2011) found that the formation of the biased compound word "much" follows the principles of happiness, rhythm, and unity of opposites. The position cannot be reversed, so "much" must be placed before "less".

(2) The meaning is imbalanced. The meaning of "how much" is very rich, and it is a high-frequency word in both spoken and written language. In the Seventh Edition of the Modern Chinese Dictionary, there are several explanations for "how much": ǒ Sh Ā o] 1) The size of the index quantity of [noun] 2) [adverb] more or less 3) [adverb] slightly [du] ǒ less ] [ interrogative pronoun ] 1) asking quantity 2) indicating an indefinite quantity. However, in different contexts, the meaning of "how much" sometimes refers to an uncertain quantity, sometimes leans towards "more", and sometimes leans towards "less", as follows:

1) In the construction of "I don't know/don't know+...+how much", the semantics tend to be "much" and are generally used in declarative and exclamatory sentences, with a large number of expressions. For example:

In that dark era, I don't know how hard people struggled.

I don't know how many years have passed, and heaven and earth have separated.

2) In the construction of "more more+(quantifier)+N", the

semantic bias is towards "more". For example:

How many nights, while I was sleeping soundly, my mother gently helped me cover the quilt I had kicked off.

3) In the construction of 'how much... also/all... no', the semantics tend to be 'more'. For example:

I won't exchange any money given to me.

4) In the construction of 'no/no/no+much+(N)', the negative adverbs 'no', 'no', and 'no' limit the number of nouns, indicating limited or very little or even almost no quantity, with a semantic bias towards 'less'. For example:

They picked the strawberries until there was not much left.

5) In the construction of 'V not+complement+how much...!', the semantic bias is towards 'less'. For example:

I can't give many reasons for him, but I just don't like him.

A little girl came out to buy clothes and cosmetics, which didn't cost much.

Therefore, in the ambiguous compound word "how much", there is also a semantic imbalance phenomenon according to different contexts.

## 5. The Frequency of Using "More" and "Less" is Unbalanced.

In relative antonyms, generally speaking, the generalization ability of the word with higher degree is greater than that of the word with lower degree, which means that the extension ability of the word with higher degree is greater than that of the word with lower degree.

### 5.1. The "A+Much More" Construction

Zhu Dexi was the first to point out that in modern Chinese, "more" forms a predicate complement relationship after an adjective and serves as a degree complement for the adjective, such as "warm and much". Ma Qingzhu also believes that 'many' is a complement to degree. This configuration is used frequently, indicating a significant degree of difference. For example:

A can be a monosyllabic adjective. This apple is much larger.

A can be a disyllabic adjective. For example, of course, it is much more luxurious than ordinary workers in terms of food and drink.

A can be a verb object phrase. I have much more experience than him.

The form of 'A+much more' is not only widely used in spoken language, but also frequently used in many literary works. For example, human life is as fragile as a reed, and anything in the universe can kill people. Even so, humans are still much more noble than anything else in the universe, because humans have a soul that can think. (Zhou Guoping's "Everyone is a Universe")

And 'less' does not have this construction.

### 5.2. The "A+too Much" Construction

'more more' forms a predicate complement relationship after an adjective, serving as a degree complement to the adjective and also indicating a significant difference in degree. The details are as follows:

A can be a monosyllabic adjective. I feel much better today.

A can be a disyllabic adjective. For example, today's weather is much warmer.

A can be a verb object phrase. For example, the old teacher does have a lot of experience.

And 'less' does not have this construction.

### 5.3. The Construction of "more/less+A/how much+A"

In this construction, it is often paired with adjectives that indicate positive meaning, and is often used in exclamation sentences, indicating a high degree of expression. For example, 'how beautiful', 'how beautiful', 'how good', 'how good', 'how interesting', 'how interesting', 'how spirited', and 'how spirited'. In this form, 'more' can also be paired with verbs and is frequently used in spoken language, such as 'read and practice more', 'exercise more', and 'drink more water', often expressing friendly reminders. It is also common in literary works, such as "reading well, reading more, reading good books" (Bing Xin's "Remembering Reading").

A common form of "multi+VV" in spoken language, such as "see more" and "listen more", often indicates a kind and gentle reminder or suggestion, with or without an object. For example, reading more books and listening to more songs can enrich our lives.

There is also such a construction for 'less', but it is often paired with verbs and verb object phrases, such as 'speak less', 'do less, act less', and 'pretend less to be pitiful'. It often expresses advice and reminders, and sometimes has a strong tone of reprimand. In this configuration, the frequency of using 'less' is significantly lower.

### 5.4. The Construction of "more/less+A+more/less+B"

The construction of "more+A+more+B" has strong vitality and solidification in Chinese.

A. There are multiple semantic relationships between B and they have certain sorting rules, as follows:

(1) A and B are usually monosyllabic words that form symmetry in structure. For example, 'read more and practice more'. A. B can also be a disyllabic word split morpheme. As in "This is a diverse and diverse picture of medical and patient beings." (Guangming Daily, 2017), "posture" is a disyllabic word. A. B can also be a disyllabic word, but its frequency of use is relatively low. Like 'more contact and communication'. A. The part of speech of B mainly consists of nouns and verbs, with a few being quantifiers. A. B is mainly arranged in the internal order of the disyllabic word "AB", for example, "morezi morewei" and "moresheng moreyu" are respectively arranged in the internal word formation order of "taste" and "fertility"; It can also be arranged according to the internal order of idioms or high-frequency phrases, such as "oily and salty" and "multi colored and multi flavored", which are actually arranged in the internal order of "firewood, rice, oil, salt", "color, aroma, and taste", etc; A. B can also be arranged according to the laws of nature, for example, it is usually rainy in summer and snowy in winter, which cycle in seasonal order. Therefore, it is generally said to be "rainy and snowy"; A. B can also be arranged in the order of cause and effect, such as "more births, more punishments"; A. B forms the relationship between members and classes, usually placing "member" before "class" to emphasize that the member is the most important or typical type of "class", such as "write more and practice more".

This construction has rich meanings, such as persuasion, prominence, objective statement, and general reference. It can be summarized as follows:

(1) A more common form is to persuade. That is, by stating the benefits or drawbacks within it, to make people accept suggestions or opinions. There are both positive persuasion

and a small amount of negative persuasion, with the former being used more frequently and the latter being less frequently. For example:

Improving Chinese language proficiency requires reading and writing more, and long-term accumulation.

(2) Objective statements. Expressing the quantity or scope of people or things involved. Such as "multiple batches" and "multiple mountains and rivers". The degree to which an action or trait is highlighted When A and B originate from disyllabic words AB, the "many" construction actually highlights the semantic degree of "AB". Multiple observations and observations highlight the depth of observation When A and B are synonymous and AB is not a word, the "many" construction actually highlights the semantic degree of the shared semantic core between A and B. For example, "more support and more help" actually highlights the degree of "help" action.

(3) General meaning. For example, "having many children and grandchildren" generally refers to "having many descendants". There is also an extended form of the 'multi A, multi B' construction, 'multi A, multi B, multi C', which is often used for blessings, such as 'many children, many blessings, and many longevity'; It can also be used for positive advice, such as "to improve writing skills, you need to read, write, and practice more

In this construction, "less+A+less+B" is often used to advise and can be paired with nouns and verbs, such as "less oil and salt" and "eat and drink less". It can also be used to extend the construction "less oil, less salt, and less sugar" to remind healthy eating, but other situations are rare.

In this configuration, there is a significant difference in frequency between "much" and "little", with "much" being used more frequently than "little".

### 5.5. The "A many B many" Configuration

(1) Both A and B are monosyllabic nouns, such as "mountains and rivers are abundant". Separate the disyllabic word "mountains and rivers" and express the concept of "mountains and rivers are abundant" to express symmetrical beauty and a sense of rhythm.

(2) A is a monosyllabic noun, and B is a disyllabic noun, such as "many people are right and not many". The two nouns have a clear logical relationship, and people are the cause of making right and wrong.

### 5.6. Unbalanced Distribution of "many" and "few" in Interrogative Sentences

(1) "more" is used as an interrogative pronoun in a specific question, and the degree or quantity of the question is mostly used as an adjective for positivity. How old is she? How high is this mountain?

'less' cannot be used in this situation.

(2) "more" is used as an adjective in yes no questions, asking questions about the number of people or things, such as:

Are there many people getting vaccinated now? Are there many wild ducks in the lake? Do you think there's too much money? The answer can be 'yes, many or no, not many'. It can be asked with doubts or without doubt.

'less' can also be used in asking right and wrong. For example, do we still suffer less from such losses? Are there very few people coming today?

'less' also asks questions about the number of people or things, and the answer is 'yes, very little or no, many'. When

the speaker uses 'less' to ask questions, their psychology already presupposes the number of people or things being asked, and questioning is a counter question to this presupposition, hoping to be confirmed.

Therefore, "less" is basically a question without doubt, while "more" can also be asked with doubts, and the scope of use should be larger.

(3) The construction of "more/less+no+more/less"

Are there many people coming today?

The psychology of the questioner can be expected to be large in quantity or small in quantity. In this case, it is generally not necessary to "reduce a lot"

Mom gave you a thousand yuan, much less?

The psychology of the questioner believes that the quantity is relatively small, but the expected answer is negative, "quite a bit, enough", thereby enhancing the rationality of the preset and achieving a pragmatic balance.

It can be seen that only when the preset is reasonable, "less, less," can be used, and "more, less," can be used much more frequently.

Through the comparison of various constructions, it is not difficult to find that there is a significant difference in the frequency of use between "much" and "little".

## 6. Conclusion

This article provides evidence on the semantic scope, word formation, collocation, and frequency of use of the pair of antonyms "much" and "little", indicating significant differences between the two, reflecting the imbalance of antonyms.

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