

Mandarin Dialects: A Comparative Study of Noun Types in the ‘X ge N’ Construction

The aim of this research is to investigate the characteristics and origins of participating noun types in the ‘X ge N’ construction across dialects within the Mandarin dialect group. An example of this construction is given below.

(1) *ni shuo ni dong wo de yisi, ni dong*
You say you understand De meaning you understand
ge pi a!
Cl fart EXCL!

‘You say you understand what I mean, you don’t understand shit!’

In order to further understand the characteristics and origins of noun types in this construction among different Chinese dialects, this paper seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What types of N are allowed in Mandarin Chinese dialects that have the ‘X ge N’ construction? (2) What similarities and differences in lexical meaning are there between N that exist in different Mandarin Chinese dialects? (3) What instances of N are used in one dialect, but not used or rarely used in others? (4) What instances of N were created in dialects?

There has been extensive research conducted up to this point on characteristics of the ‘X ge N’ construction since Du (2006) first introduced it as the ‘V/A ge P!’ construction with a constructional meaning of ‘negation’. Subsequent research has expanded on Du’s original findings, most notably Cui (2014) who further widened its constructional scope and renamed it to the ‘X ge N’ construction. His research proposed additional constructional meanings, and provided corpus-based frequency evidence to determine allowed types of N such as curse words, non-curse words, and new types derived from dialectal words. Despite there being a large existing body of research on the X ge N construction and its characteristics, most research has focused on this construction exclusively within Modern Standard Chinese. This paper seeks to fill this gap in existing research by exploring this construction and its characteristics within the context of Chinese dialects, more specifically dialects within the Mandarin dialect group.

Additionally, for many Chinese as a second language (CSL) learners as well as younger native Chinese speakers, it is unclear what kinds of social interactions are appropriate to use certain constructions and constructional elements. This type of ability notably draws upon L2 learners semantic memory (Cicourel, 1981) which is not a main point of focus in current CSL classrooms. This paper seeks to fulfill this need and further contribute to understanding how constructions, and constructional elements are used in different social interactions. To this end, this research supplements an analysis of existing literature on X ge N noun types with original interview data collected from representatives across the Mandarin dialect group.