On the Evolution of Chinese Resultative Constructions: A Case Study of "V-败 (bài; defeat/fail)" Constructions

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Chinese resultative constructions have been a highly-debated topic in the last few decades. Previous studies mainly focus on thematic relations (Li 1990, Zhao 2009) and syntactic movements (Hashimoto 1964, Thompson 1973) within the components of the constructions (Jiang 2019). Such explanations pay more attention to the composing parts of the constructions, but the gestalt properties of the resultative constructions should not be neglected as the constructions are depicted by features independent of their components, such as the transitivity of the constructions and the causative meaning represented by the constructions (Jiang 2019). Though great contribution has been made, few studies investigate the Chinese resultative constructions from a constructional view. In addition, a limited number of studies examine Chinese resultative constructions based on corpus data and from a diachronic perspective.

To narrow the gap, this study attempts to investigate Chinese resultative constructions quantitatively and diachronically. Specifically, a corpus-based case study is undertaken to track the diachronic change of the constructions based on the theoretical framework of construction grammar. We select one of the frequently-used and typical Chinese resultative constructions, i.e., "V-败(bài; defeat/fail)" constructions as the research targets, in which "败-bài" is an ergative verb with the meaning of "defeat" and "fail". This study mainly answers the following three questions: (1) What are the formal and semantic features of the"V-败(bài; defeat/fail)" constructions across the stages? (2) What evolutionary pathways do the constructions display diachronically? (3) What are the cognitive motivations for the evolution of the constructions?

The data are extracted from CCL Corpus of ancient Chinese, compiled by Peking University. It provides texts from a wide range of disciplines according to the dynasties in Chinese history. Traugott and Dasher (2002) classified the almost 3500 years history of the Chinese language into seven stages. Following Traugott and Dasher's (2002) classification and guided by the match between the stages and dynasties, we randomly select 100 instances per dynasty after deleting the repetitive and invalid concordance lines.

It is expected to present the constructional network of the "V-败(bài; defeat/fail)"constructions by analyzing the formal and semantic features across the stages. A pilot study indicates that there is a bridging context in which the constructions undergo a change of semantic preference from the action of defeating to the state of being failed. It is argued that the change might provide evidence for the typological shift of ancient Chinese. Moreover, it reveals that the "V-败(bài; defeat/fail)" constructions in Mandarin frequently represent the event of state change, as one of the five types of macro-event (Talmy 2000). The macro-event presented by the constructions may contribute to a more complex and abstract Chinese grammar system (Wang 1988).

This study contributes to the understanding of the evolution of Chinese resultative constructions per se, shedding light on the study of other Chinese resultative constructions, which might have implications for resultative constructions in other languages.

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