

A Contrastive Study of 'N + NC' and 'NC + N' in Chinese

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In this study, we investigate the difference between 'N + NC' and 'NC + N' in modern Chinese by analyzing the features of their existing environments and examining cognitive features of the two structures in Chinese. We find some evidence that 'N + NC' is frequently used in strengthening the memory for Ns and NCLs when both are required information.

Introduction

There has been little research on the 'N (noun) + NC (numerical classifier)' structure of Chinese. Most Chinese linguists have treated 'NC + N' as a representative pattern of modern Chinese (Hu, 1965; W. Li, 2000; Biq, 2004; Wang, 1978; J. Li, 1938; Okochi, 1985; Nakagawa & Li, 1997; etc.), but no linguists except Hu (1957) and Liu (1965) have studied Chinese 'N + NC'. Liu's study involved 'N + NC' use from BC 3,700 to AD 907¹⁾. Liu thought that 'N + NC' during this period was used to list items and to stress quantity. He pointed out that 'N + NC' is used to list items and also to emphasize N in modern Chinese, and that for the latter point, the structure always contains the special feeling of the speaker. On the other hand, Hu's (1957) proposal is ambiguous and problematic. In this paper, we propose that the function of 'N + NC' is to list items and emphasize both N and NC. Furthermore, we will point out an obvious problem of Hu's view on 'N + NC'. The function of listing items is also related to a structural feature psychologically accessible to native Chinese people, which may be treated by memorization and recitation of the content of the structure. The fact that waiters and waitresses at a restaurant who take orders from customers always use this 'N + NC' forms constitutes supporting evidence.

Discussion

What are the differences between Chinese 'N + NC' and 'NC + N'?

In modern Chinese, 'NC + N' is the typical structure to express phrases containing N and NC. However, we can also find the structure, 'N + NC' in modern Chinese. Hu (1957, 50) considers that 'N + NC' in modern Chinese is used in only two situations: listing items and emphasizing the noun in this structure. His first point is correct, but the second one is

problematic.

Hu (1957, 50) says that people use 'N + NC' to stress the N and show that the N is different from other things besides listing items, and this kind of sentence is always used in expressing a special feeling. Hu gives the following example to support his idea:

- (1) Fangemingfenzi ruguo bu tanbai zhishou, name tade mianqian zhi you
Anti-revolutionist if not frankly confess then his front only has
shi lu yi tiao.
death road one Cl (classifier)

If the anti-revolutionists do not confess, there is only one choice, the death-road for them.

It seems that Hu's view is right if we do not pay attention to the extra grammatical feature of *shi lu yi tiao*. Because *shi lu* is a noun with a special feeling which is used to express the highest level, it is certainly emphasized. And even if *yi tiao* is omitted, *shi lu* is still a salient element stressed by the speaker. However, Hu ignored the fact that 'N + NC's like *shi lu yi tiao* are proverbs which are used as fixed constituents and cannot be treated as common syntactic entities. Being proverbs, they are difficult to analyze syntactically. In Chinese, a proverb is considered as an indivisible entity, in which all the contents are salient as a whole. This can be proved by the result of a questionnaire held in this study. In the questionnaire, 10 native Chinese speakers were asked what was emphasized in the proverbs of 'N + NC' structure in the below examples(2) and (3). There are three choices for every sentence: ① the N, ② the NC and ③ both the N and NC. They could choose only one. Nine subjects chose ③ for both sentences. The other one did not choose from the given numbers of choices but he orally explained that both the N and NC are important as the information in both sentences. Even the proverbs containing 'N + NC's clearly illustrate the problem of Hu's view. For examples:

Native Chinese people often say:

- (2) (Sb) you jia cai wan guan. (Sb=somebody)
(Sb) has family fortune ten-thousand Cl
(Sb)'s fortune is ten thousand guans.

The sentence below shows that Sb has a significant amount of field:

- (3) (Sb) you liang tian wan qing.
(Sb) has/have good field ten-thousand Cl
(Sb) has/have ten-thousand qing of good field.

Jia cai wan guan in (2) and *liang tian wan qing* in (3) both are proverbs. Can we say that *jiacai* (fortune) in (2) and *lian tian* (good field) in (3) are stressed but that *wan guan* and *wan qing* are not? Surely, we cannot. If only fortune is emphasized, the pragmatic connotation of (2) and (3) will be:

(2) What I want to say is **fortune** sb has ten thousand of but not other things.

(3) What I want to say is **lian tian** what sb has ten thousand qing of but not other things.

However, we know *wan guan* can only be used to classify money (= fortune here), speakers need not to emphasize *fortune*, addressees can understand it very clearly according to the classifier. The latter one is the same. The 'N + NC's in (1), (2) and (3) are all used as proverbs with rhetorical colors. Therefore, the two (N and NC) are indivisible and used as one entity. Because of this, both of them will be salient at the same time. So, Hu's proposal is not accurate.

In (1), (2) and (3), all the 'N + NC's are proverbs. Then, how about the 'N + NC' if it is not used in a proverb? In order to investigate this issue, two sentences are listed. They contain 'N + NC's, which are not proverbs.

(4) Zhongguo you renkou 13 yi²⁾
China has population 1.3 billion
The population of China is 1.3 billion.

(5) Na suo daxue you xuesheng 8 qian duo ren
that university has students eight thousand more people
There are more than eight thousand students in that university.

Eight native Chinese speakers were asked whether the two sentences could be used naturally in everyday expressions. All of them confirmed that (4) and (5) were not so natural, because they thought there should be more 'N + NC' phrases in the two sentences, otherwise 'NC + N' is more suitable. So, we can say 'N + NC' can only be used in proverbs or in listing items as Hu pointed out (1957, 50).

In modern Chinese, as Liu mentioned, 'N + NC' is very frequently used in listing items. In almost all Chinese recipes, ingredients are listed with the structure of 'N + NC'. When people mention something with a number of categories and their quantities, 'N + NC' is

preferred. In restaurants, a waiter or waitress generally uses 'N + NC' to clarify orders from customers and to convey them to cooks orally in the following way:

(6) (in a restaurant, a waiter's order-check and order-conveying)

Chaofan liang wan, qingjiaorouyi yi pan, sanxiantang yi wan...

Chaofan two bowls, qinjiaorouyi one plate, sanxiantang one bowl...

Two bowls of chaofan, one plate of qinjiaorouyi, one bowl of sanxiantang.

(7) (for seasonings of a Chinese cooking recipe on the internet)

Tiaoliao: jiangyou 10 ke, cu 10 ke, yan 1.5 ke, weijing 1 ke, cong 1 ke.

Seasoning: soy 10 g, vinegar 10 g, salt 1.5 g, weijing 1 g, onion 1 g.

dianfen 2 ke, you 20 ke.

starch 2 g, oil 20 g

The seasonings: 10 g of soy, 10 g of vinegar, 1.5 g of salt, 1g of weijing, 1 g of onion, 2 g of starch and 20 g of oil.

(8) (from the Internet)

Danganguan kuchun zhizhi dangan 61154 juan, zhaopian 60297 zhang

file-museum store paper file 61154 volume, photograph 60297 piece

(han dipian), luyin luxiang dai 1719 pan, ditu 3190

(contain film), sound-record picture-record tape 1719 CL, ditu(?) 3190

zhang, ziliao 1004 juan (ce)³⁾, ...

piece, reference 1004 volume, ...

In the file museum, there are 61154 volumes of paper files, 60297 photographs including films, 1719 sound and picture record tapes, 3190 pieces of ditu and 1004 volumes of references.

Why do these phenomena occur? To answer this, let us change all the 'N + NC's of (6), (7) and (8) into their corresponding 'NC + N's. The three new sentences are (6'), (7') and (8').

(6') Lian wan chaofan, yi pan qingjiaorouyi, yi wan sanxiantang...

(7') Tiaoliao: 10 ke jiangyou, 10 ke chu, 1.5 ke yan, 1 ke weijin, 1 ke chong, 2 ke dianfen, 20 ke you.

(8') dananguan kuchun 61154 juan zizhi danan, 60297 zhang zhaopian (han dipian), 1719 pan luyin luxiangdai, 3190 zhang ditu, 1004 juan (ce) zhiliao, ...

Twenty native Chinese speakers were asked which one they preferred and why they thought so. All the 20 addressees chose (6), (7) and (8) as their preferences. Their reasons were almost the same: they thought 'N + NC' was clearer and more concise. Why is 'N + NC' clearer and more concise than 'NC + N' in listing sentences? We think it is because 'NC

+ N' is the basic and common structure; people use NC as the modifier of N, thus, 'NC + N', is NP, a very firm combination, so, can taken as one constituent. Unlike this, 'N + NC' diverts from the common principle. When NC is located behind N, it is difficult to be considered as the modifier of N. N and NC are more like two separate elements. So, they are regarded as one constituent. Because 'N + NC' is similar with the frame of the sentence structure, 'S (subject)/T (topic) + P (predicate)', they would be psychologically accepted as 'S (subject)/T (topic) + P (predicate)'. According to Rubin's famous theory of **figure/ground segregation**, people can psychologically perceive only NC or N (note again: NC stands for numeral classify and N noun) in 'NC + N' at the same moment. However, people will hope addressees recognize both N and NC when they list items. So, there are some weak points in using 'NC + N' to list items. In contrast, people can more clearly perceive N and NC in 'N + NC' one by one without the affecting **figure/ground segregation** according to the same theory. We can use examples to explain this.

- (9) Beijing daxue you zhongguo kexueyuan yuanshi 53 ren, zhongguo gongchengyuan yuanshi 8 ren, disan shijie kexueyuan yuanshi 12 ren
 Beijing university has CAS⁴⁾ academician 53 person China
 AE academician 8 persons, third world AS academician 12 persons

In Beijing University, there are 53 members of CAS, 8 members of CAE, and 12 members of the Third-World Academy of Sciences.

Sentence (9) is psychologically processed as

- (9) Beijing daxue you zhongguo kexueyuan yuanshi. Yuanshi you 53 ren. You...

or

- (9') Beijing daxue you zhongguo kexueyuan yuanshi. Zhongguo kexueyuan de renshu (number) shi 53 ren...

We gave a questionnaire to 10 native Chinese speakers. They were asked to compare the clarity and accessibility of (9), (9') and (10). All 10 subjects judged the first two sentences were obviously clearer and more accessible than (10).

- (10) Beijing daxue you 53 wei⁵⁾ zhongguo kexueyuan yuanshi, 8 wei gongchengyuan yuanshi, shi er wei di san shijie kexueyuan yuanshi.

Compared with (9), sentence (10) was considered less clear and more awkward by all of the questioned 10 native Chinese speakers. The result provides a possible explanation as to why in restaurants (or, for that matter, in similar situations) and in listing items and their quantities, 'N + NC' is generally used, possibly because in these kinds of situations, both the N and NC are required information and need to be memorized, also because 'NC + N' is intentionally taken as 'modifier + N', 'N + NC' is used. This can also be explained with the conception of propositions. (9) and (9'') contain the same propositions as (11):

- (11) a There are CAS in Beijing university
and
b The number of CAS is 53
and..

(9) and (9'') are possibly processed in different ways as (12) and (13).

- (12) a There are CAS in Beijing university
and
b The number of CAS is 53
c I hope you pay attention to both a and b (c is the speech act)
and..

- (13) a There are CAS in Beijing university
and
b The number of CAS is 53
c I only hope you pay attention to a (c is the speech act)
and..

We can summarize the discussion now. When 'N + NC' appears in a proverb, it gives a rhetorical/special feeling of speakers and both N and NC are made salient at the same time. We propose that native Chinese people like using 'N + NC' in listing items because they psychologically access 'N + NC' in the sentence of listing items not as an NP but as 'S/T (N) + P (NC)'. This psychological process can make both the N and the NC salient. Since people recognize 'N + NC' as 'S + P', S and P are the main contents. They are memorized as two parts in two spaces, so their memorized units are shorter than 'NC + N'. Thus, they are easier for people to output and input when people want to emphasize both the NC and the N at the same time. Furthermore, because they are not in one constituent, they both can be salient at the same time. In 'NC + N', the NC and the N are memorized together as

one constituent in which NC is easily recognized as the modifying part and the N as the nucleus of the body and necessary information. When people use this structure to memorize N and NC at the same time, this structure is opposite to the nature. It would be more difficult to output and input 'NC + N', and in this structure, NC and N cannot be salient at the same time. All these phenomena introduced above offer us clues suggesting that it would be possible.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have pointed out that in modern Chinese, 'N + NC' still exists and pointed out the problem of Hu's view that in modern Chinese 'N + NC' is used to emphasize N. This structure can be used to stress NC and N at the same time. It is used only in two situations in modern Chinese: as a proverb or in listing items. When it is used as a proverb, NC and N are both emphasized rhetorically and with a special feeling of the speaker. If 'N + NC' is used in listing items, both NC and N are made salient at the same time but there is no rhetorical color in this kind of expression. It is possible that Chinese 'N + NC' is psychologically processed by people as 'S/T + P', and this process allows the memory for both the N and the NC to be strengthened.

Notes

- 1) Liu (1965) primarily focused on the period from A.D. 220 to A.D. 581.
- 2) The classifier, *ren* is omitted behind *shi san yi*.
- 3) *Ce* in English is also *volume*.
- 4) CAS stands for China Academy of Sciences and CAE, China Academy of Engineering.
- 5) *Ren* cannot be used here, *wei* is used to represent it. In this paper, we will not address why this phenomenon occurs.

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