

Constructional Contamination in Chinese Analytic Causative Constructions: A Corpus-based Analysis

Abstract

Research question – In the framework of Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995, 2006; Hilpert, 2014, 2021), this study empirically tests to what extent there is constructional contamination in Chinese **analytic causative constructions** (ACCxns henceforth) with 使 *shǐ* ‘make’ and 让 *ràng* ‘make, let’, the two most frequently used causative markers (Lyu [吕叔湘], 1942/1982; Wang [王力], 1943/1985), and specifically, to what extent such constructional contamination influences the development of Chinese ACCxn network.

Background – The term *constructional contamination*, defined by Pijpops and Van de Velde (2016: 543), refers to “the effect whereby a subset of instances of a target construction is (stochastically) affected in its realization by a contaminating construction, because of a coincidental resemblance between the superficial strings of instances of the target construction and a number of instances of the contaminating construction.” The effect of constructional contamination has been demonstrated in case studies conducted by Pijpops and Van de Velde (2016) and Hilpert and Flach (forthcoming), calling for more observations in different languages. The present study attends to Chinese ACCxns in the past and at present, in order to make clear if constructional contamination plays a role in the formation and the development of Chinese ACCxn network.

Data and Method – Data for this study is extracted from the historical sub-corpora of the CCL corpus (Zhan et al. [詹卫东等], 2003, 2019). CCL corpus is one of the largest online accessible corpora of Chinese language, consisting of two sub-corpora, i.e., historical (163,662,943 characters) and contemporary (509,913,589 characters). In order to identify if there is constructional contamination between ACCxns with *shǐ* and *ràng*, this study conducts the collexeme analysis and the multiple distinctive collexeme analysis (Stefanowitsch & Gries, 2003, 2005; Gries & Stefanowitsch, 2004) and focuses on the ambiguous occurrences in which both *shǐ* and *ràng* can be used and interpreted, as according to Pijpops & Van de Velde (2016), contamination takes place through superficial resemblances. Next, to measure the constructional contamination between ACCxns with *shǐ* and *ràng*, this study evaluates their prototypical features respectively and arrives at figuring out the significantly distinguishing variables.

Expected results – On the basis of historical Chinese data, this study will display the relationship between ACCxns with *shǐ* and *ràng*, during which the constructional contamination involved will be explored and quantified.

Keywords: analytic causative constructions; constructional contamination; collostructional analysis; Chinese

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