

Research Article

From Dialogue to Monologue: A Dialogic Syntax Approach to the Construal Mechanism of “爱(ai) V 不(bu) V” in Chinese

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Abstract

The “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction in Chinese is a parallel construction composed of “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V”. Based on the investigation of the corpus CCL, the parallelism and resonance between “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” are analyzed in the framework of Dialogic Syntax in this paper and a construal mechanism for “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction is constructed and verified through case studies. The resonating “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” are respectively reduced to two complex sentences with parallel forms and opposite meanings: “如果爱 V 就 V; 如果不爱 V, 就不 V ruguo aiV, jiuV; ruguo bu aiV, jiu buV”(if you want to V, then V; if you don't want to V, don't V). Form resonance between complex sentences triggers semantic resonance, that is, the opposition between two hypothetical relations. This oppositional relation constructs two corresponding events through conceptual expansion, namely, choosing-to-V event and choosing-not-to-V event. Strong contrasts and conflicts between these events activate event resonance which provides two options for the choice of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction. In the process of event integration, the speaker expresses an inclination for this choice through cognitive prominence, thereby conveying their communicative intentions. This study not only expands of application of Dialogic Syntax to monologue, but also represents a valuable attempt to dynamically analyze static language, offering insights into the interpretation of other parallel structures in linguistic study and natural language processing.

Keywords

“爱(ai)V 不(bu)V”, Dialogic Syntax, Construal Mechanism, Resonance

1. Introduction

Syntactically, the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction constitutes a coordinate structure formed by the dialogic juxtaposition of two parallel constituents: “爱(ai)V” (“if one wants to V”) and “不(bu)V” (“if one does not want to V”). Shen [32, 33, 34] characterizes this as an oppositional parallel structure, where the formal symmetry between components generates semantic complementarity through contrast. Semantically,

the construction superficially encodes a biclausal conditional logic—“If you want to V, then V; if not, do not V”—ostensibly granting the listener free choice [4, 12, 13]. However, empirical data reveal a pragmatic paradox: while the structure's surface semantics simulate optionality, its actual usage predominantly imposes the speaker's implicit inclination, imbuing the construction with discontent when the listener resists compliance. Consider the exchange:

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(1) “说不吃就不吃—你别烦我了。”“爱吃不吃，真他妈不识好歹。”

王朔《我是你爸爸》

“shuo buchi jiu buchi—ni bie fanwo le.” “aichi buchi, zhen tama bushi haodai.”

wang shuo 《wo shi ni baba》

“I said I won’t eat, so I won’t—stop nagging me!” “Suit yourself, you ungrateful bastard. Not even worth the damn effort!”

From Shuo, Wang. *I Am Your Father*.

Here, “爱吃不吃 ai chi bu chi” (if you want to eat, then eat; If you don’t want to eat, don’t eat) ostensibly offers two choices but pragmatically coerces the “eat” option through prosodic intensity and contextual framing. This discrepancy between semantic neutrality and pragmatic coercion raises a critical question: How does the 爱 V 不 V construction reconcile its structural symmetry with its functional asymmetry?

So far, many scholars have explored the meaning of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction, but most have focused on summarizing and describing its semantic functions [4, 13, 18, 20, 46, 47]. Niu and Niu [21] discussed the semantic conceptualization characteristics of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction from a usage-based perspective, unifying its various meanings under a schematic network, which is quite original. However, the previous studies did not involve systematic analysis of the construal mechanism linking form to pragmatic force, in order to explain the inclination of the choice and the discontent it conveys. To address this gap, the study adopts Dialogic Syntax [6], integrating cognitive linguistics and philosophy of mind to propose a construal mechanism of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction, trying to solve the following questions:

- 1) What dialogic-syntactic features enable the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction to encode opposing selectional meanings through resonance?
- 2) How does cognitive prominence during event integration drive the speaker’s implicit inclination between these selectional options?
- 3) How does the pragmatic discontent of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction is conveyed in the process of semantic construal?

This study consists of four sub-sections: 1) the analysis of Dialogic Syntax and resonance; 2) the analysis of Dialogic Syntactic features of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction; 3) the build of the construal mechanism of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction; 4) the verification of this construal mechanism.

2. Dialogic Syntax and Resonance

Dialogic syntax theory is the product of the integration of cognitive linguistics and interactional linguistics [6] (P. 461) [33]. It analyzes the parallel mapping relationships and resonance effects between dialogues in natural conversation from

an interactive cognitive perspective, aiming to reveal the roles of language, cognition, and interaction in meaning inference [3, 7-9, 19, 23, 35-41, 48]. In dialogue communication, the speaker constructs target utterances by reusing linguistic resources of preceding utterances intentionally or unintentionally. The produced target utterances have parallel characteristics with the preceding ones in form, which catalyzes and activates affinity between them so as to produce dialogic resonance [6] (P. 359-360). This affinity includes both similarity and difference [6] (P. 360). In other words, it encompasses the relationships of analogy and contrast. Resonance is not the inherent essence of a single component, but rather a property of the relationship between two or more components within a discourse [6] (P. 372). Any aspect of language can lead to the resonance [40]. So it can be divided into form resonance and meaning resonance. Form resonance includes similarities in the explicit representations of utterance such as phonetics, vocabulary, syntax, etc., while meaning resonance encompasses semantic relationships between words that are similar, opposite, or superordinate/subordinate, affinity between discourse semantic structures, affinity between conceptual schemas or conceptual structures involved in discourse [6] (P. 372) [43, 50], and affinity between discourse involved in event [10, 25, 26, 28, 29]. Formal involvement contributes to meaning involvement [6, 19], and form resonance triggers and highlights meaning resonance [35-37]. Bakhtin [2, 17] pointed out that dialogue is a universal phenomenon of human life, and the essential attribute of language is dialogicality. Each of our utterances is a response to previous utterances in the field: either refuting, affirming, supplementing, relying on them, or viewing them as the known premise for one’s own utterance [1] (P. 177). Based on the previous theory, two parallel components, “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V”, are endowed the dialogicality in a broad sense. The two parallel parts “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” in juxtaposition prompts the contrast between two meanings, and then produces dialogic resonance. Within monologue, resonance exists between different components. In this study, we expand the application of Dialogic Syntax into monologue “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction to explore the resonance between parallel components. The following analysis will delineate Dialogic Syntactic features of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction.

3. Dialogic Syntactic Features of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” Construction

The data of this study are mainly from the CCL Corpus which contains approximately 5.84 billion characters, including modern Chinese and ancient Chinese. The sample drawn for this study comes from modern Chinese recorded between 1910s to 2020s. Based on an exhaustive search, 296 records are founded. Since some of them are cited from the

same context of same work but different versions and some of them are not the exact target but coincident with the construction such as “热爱够不够”, we omit 100 of them. The total of the samples from the CCL is 196 [49].

After observing all these 196 samples, we find that the parallel elements “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” within the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction exhibit a dialogic resonance. “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” is a four-character parallel structure, as shown in Table 1, where the parallel elements “爱(à)V” and “不(bu)V” are juxtaposed, thereby generating parallel mapping between them. “爱(ai)V” means “if one wants to V, then V,” expressing an affirmative hypothesis; “不(bu)V” means “if one does not want to V, then do not V,” expressing a negative hypothesis. The opposition between affirmation and negation activates the dialogic resonance between “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V”. “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” represent a relationship of horizontal continuation and vertical selection, not only reflecting unilateral continuity but also bilateral interaction. Therefore, the meaning of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” is not a simple addition of “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” but rather it emerges as a whole. The “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” structure possesses a complex semantic network.

Table 1. The Dialogic Syntactic Analysis of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” Construction.

If one wants to V, then V (An affirmative hypothesis)
爱(ai)V
不(bu)V
If one does not want to V, then do not V (A negative hypothesis)

Above all, it is found that the resonance in “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction leads to its core meaning, the relationship of choice. The inclination embodied in the meaning of selection is so common in “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction. From this perspective, the meaning of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction can be categorized into two major groups: inclination-based choice and non-inclination-based choice (Niu and Niu, 2021).

The inclination-based choice refers that the speaker prefers to “V” or not, implying that the speaker requires or hopes that the party involved chooses to V or not to V. Precisely because of this strong inclination, if the party’s behavior deviates from the speaker’s expectations or wishes, the speaker’s words will carry strong discontent. Therefore, it can be said that to V and not to V are external manifestations of the contradiction between the speaker and the party involved regarding whether to V or not.

The inclination-based choice can be further divided into two sub-types. In the first sub-type, the speaker hopes to V

but the party is reluctant. For example, in Example (1), Ma Linsheng demands his son to eat, but the son refuses, disobeying Ma Linsheng’s request. Consequently, when he says, “爱吃不吃 ai chi bu chi” (If you want to eat, then eat; if you don’t want to eat, don’t eat), his words are obviously tinged with discontent and anger towards his son. In Example (2), the elder brother wants Xiaopo to kowtow to him, but Xiaopo is unwilling and even asks for a condition in exchange, which angers the elder brother. Thus, his words, “爱磕不磕 ai ke bu ke” (if you want to kowtow, then kowtow; if you don’t want to kowtow, don’t kowtow), are tinged with apparent anger. In example (3), the county magistrate demanded a donation of one thousand taels from each shop, but Lu Dake, being stingy, was only willing to donate fifty taels; the housekeeper speculated that the county magistrate might not want to accept it. Lu Dake was very angry and said “爱要不要 ai yao bu yao” (If they want to accept it, accept it; if they don’t want to accept it, do not accept it), actually hoping that the county magistrate would still accept his donation. In example (4), the speaker’s expectation is: “When people go shopping at the marketplace, the staff should attend to the customers.” However, the reality is that the staff are unwilling to pay any attention to the customers. Here, “pay attention or not” actually expresses a negative meaning [20] (P. 48) [5], through which the speaker conveys dissatisfaction with the staff’s attitude. Secondly, the speaker prefers not to V, or in other words, the speaker hopes that “V” does not occur, while the party wishes to V. For instance, in Example (5), the speaker hopes that the party does not fall ill, but the party desires to be sick, leading to discontent and a firm attitude from the speaker towards the party involved.

(2) 小坡又给母亲磕了三个头，刚要起来，哥哥说：“还有我呢！”小坡假装没听见，站起来对哥哥说：“你要叫我看看你的图画，我就给你磕！”“偏不给你看！爱磕不磕！”哥哥说。

老舍《小坡的生日》

xiaopo you gei muqin kele sange tou, gang yao qilai, gege shuo: “hai you wo ne!” xiaopo jiazhuang mei tingjian, zhan qilai dui gege shuo: “ni yao jiao wo kankan ni de tuhua, wo jiu gei ni ke!” “pian bu gei ni kan! ai ke bu ke!” gege shuo.

lao she 《xiao po de sheng ri》

Xiaopo had kowtowed three more times to his mother and was just beginning to rise when his brother demanded, “What about me?” Pretending not to hear, Xiaopo stood up and countered, “If you want me to kowtow, show me your drawings first!” “Not a chance! Suit yourself!” retorted his brother.

From Laoshe. Xiaopo’s Birthday

(3) (县长要求该县所有商号捐钱助海防。大伙商定一个商铺一千两；陆大可抠门，一个商铺只捐五十两。)陆大可怒道“就这么多，他爱要不要，就这么多我还心疼呢，”说着他捂住心口，又“哎哟哎哟”地叫起来。

朱秀海《乔家大院》

(xianzhang yaoqiu gaixian suoyou shanghao juanqian zhu haifang. dahuo shangding yi ge shangpu yiqian liang, ludake koumen, yi ge shangpu zhijuan wushi liang.)

ludake nudao "jiu zheme duo, ta aiyao buyao, jiu zheme duo wo hai xinteng ne," shuozhe ta wuzhu xinkou, you "aiyo aiyo" de jiaoqilai.

zhu xiu hai «qiao jia da yuan»

(The county magistrate demanded that all the businesses in the county donate money for coastal defense. It was agreed upon that each shop would contribute one thousand taels; however, Lu Dake, known for his stinginess, only donated fifty taels per shop.)

Angered, Lu Dake said, "This is all there is--take it or leave it!. It still pains me to give this much." As he spoke, he clutched his chest, followed by exaggerated cries of "Ouch, ouch."

From Zhu Xiuhai's *The Grand Mansion of the Qiao Family*

(4) 一些大的网购店的服务更是到位, 和商场爱理不理的店员比起来, 网购客服 24 小时在线, 有问必答, 还非常热情。

《中国青年报》, 2009

yxie da de wanggoudian de fuwu gengshi daowei, he shangchang aili buli de dianyuan biqilai, wanggou kefu 24 xiaoshi zaixian, youwen bida, hai feichang reqing.

«zhongguo qingnian bao», 2009

"The services provided by some large online stores are especially excellent. Compared to the indifferent salespeople in shopping malls, online customer service is available 24 hours a day, ready to answer any questions and always very enthusiastic."

From *China Youth Daily*, 2009

(5) 你爱病不病, 关键是这次出差你必须去。

刘承峰, 2004

ni aibing bubing, guanjian shi zheci chuchai ni bixu qu.

liuchengfeng, 2004

"Whether you're sick or not isn't my concern - the crucial point is you must attend this business trip."

From Chengfeng, Liu. 2004

The non-inclination-based choice refers that the speaker has no preference for V-ing or not. Here are the following three cases. Firstly, the party may choose to V or not to V. That is to say, either option is acceptable. For example (6), "爱买不买 ai mǎi bu mǎi" (if we want to buy, then buy; if we don't want to buy, don't buy). Secondly, whether to V or not to V is decided by the individual themselves. For instance in example (7), whether to "喝 hē" (drink) or "不喝 bu hē" (not to drink) is his own choice, with no preference from the speaker. Thirdly, the choice of V or not to V is indifferent to the speaker, who considers it unrelated to themselves. As in example (8), Li Mianyu believes that whether Xiao Keping's brother gets married or not is irrelevant and insignificant to himself (though this is said in anger by Li).

(6) 我们进去后, 有时候也可以随便看, 随便翻, 但用得着“劳驾”“多谢”的时候也有; 不过爱买不买, 决不至于遭白眼的。

朱自清《三家书店》

women jinqu hou, youshihou ye keyi suibian kan, suibian fan, dan yongdezha "laojia" "duoxie" de shihou ye you; buguo aimai bumai, juebuzhiyu zao baiyan de.

zhu ziqing «sanjia shudian»

"After entering, sometimes we could casually browse and flip through books, but there were also times when "Excuse me" or "Thank you" are necessary to say; However, whether we make a purchase or not, we'd never receive condescending glances."

From Ziqing, Zhu's *Three Bookstores*.

(7) 第二祝酒不劝酒。你可以讲, 我们为两国人民的友谊, 我们为两个单位的合作来干杯, 他爱喝不喝, 不要强迫服务。

百家讲坛 金正昆《涉外礼仪》

dier zhujiu bu quanjiu. ni keyi jiang, women wei liangguo renmin de youyi, women wei liangge danwei de hezuo lai ganbei, ta aihe buhe, buyao qiangpo fuwu.

Baijia jiangtan ·jin zheng kun «shewai liyi»

"Secondly, propose a toast without urging others to drink. You can say, "Let's toast to the friendship between our two nations, to the cooperation of our two organizations. Whether they actually drink or not should be entirely their choice - never force service or consumption."

From Zhengkun, Jin's *Etiquette in Foreign Affairs* in the lecture series *Lecture Room*

(8) (李缅宇在全神贯注地玩游戏, 妻子肖科平要跟他商量事情: 弟弟要结婚, 要李缅宇找同学装修房子。李没心思听。肖很生气, 关了两次电视)

"你再来劲? 你再动一下电视试试?" 李缅宇指着肖科平脸, 也气得直喘。"少拿你们家那些破事烦我! 你弟弟结婚, 爱结不结,"

li mianyu zai quanshenguanzhu di wan youxi, qizi xiao keping yao gen ta shangliang shiqing: didi yao jiehun, yao li mianyu zhao tongxue zhuangxiufangzi. li meixinsi ting. xiao hen shengqi, guanle liangci dianshi)

"ni zai laijin? ni zai dongyixia dianshi shishi?" li mianyu zhizhe xiao keping lian, ye qide zhichuan.

"shao na nimenjia naxie poshi fan wo! ni didi jiehun, aijie bujie,"

wang shuo «wuren hecai»

(Li Mianyu was concentrated on playing a game when his wife, Xiao Keping, wanted to talk with him about her brother who was getting married and she needed Li Mianyu to ask some classmates for help to decorate the house. Li was not paying attention. Xiao Keping angrily turned off the television twice) "Are you going to try again? Turn off the TV one more time?" Li Mianyu pointed at Xiaoke Ping's face, also panting with anger. "Stop bothering me with your family's nonsense! Whether your brother marries or not--that's his business..."

From Shuo, Wang’s *No One Cheers*.

As Table 2 shows, among the 196 “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” constructions searched in the CCL, we found that 167 of them, accounting for 85.2%, express a preferential choice, all indicating the speaker’s inclination. Among them, 156 sam-

ples, accounting for 79.6%, express to choose to V with discontent and 11 samples, accounting for 5.6%, express not to choose V with discontent. 29 samples, accounting for 14.8%, convey no clear inclination.

Table 2. Distribution of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” Construction with Inclination.

“爱(ai)V 不(bu)”	Proportion		Proportion
Inclined choice	85.2%	To V with discontent	
		Not to V with discontent	
		Either option is acceptable	79.6%
Disinclined choise	14.8%	Decided by the party involved	6.6%
		Unrelated with the speaker	3%

Therefore, we can conclude that the archetypal meaning of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)” is an inclination to choose to V, while also conveying the speaker’s discontent. This discovery also confirms the grammaticalization of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction. The “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction was formed through omission, integration, and reanalysis based on the contrastive compound sentence “If one wants to V, then V; if one does not want V, then do not V”. However, the semantic emotional tone of this compound sentence is relatively neutral, but through the process of syntactic grammaticalization, in which

the compound sentence continuously condensed into a four-character structure— “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V”, its meaning and subjective emotion have been intensified with some changes such as subjectification and modalization [12, 13].

In summary, the meaning of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction can be regarded as a schematic network with the relationship of “choice” as the schema and “inclined choice” and “disinclined choice” as its instances. Among them, the inclined choice towards V serves as the archetypal meaning, as illustrated in Figure 1.

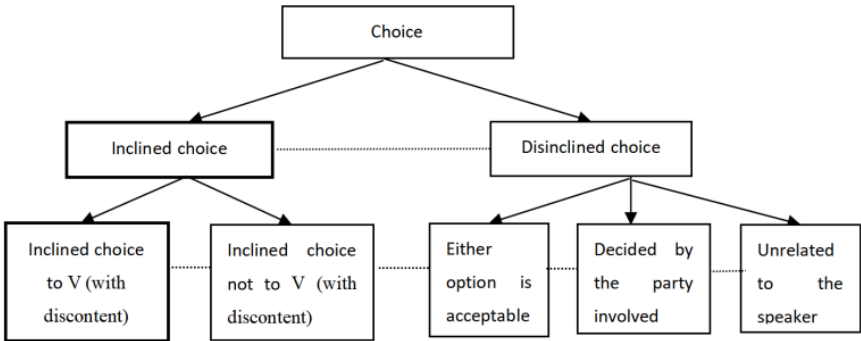


Figure 1. The Schematic Network of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” Construction.

Note: Boxes indicate network nodes; Bold boxes indicate the archetypal meaning; Arrows indicate schema-instance relationships; The dashed line indicates the extension

The semantic core of the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction resides in its “selection relation”, encompassing both inclined and non-inclined selection types. This raises a pivotal question: How are the selection meaning, the inclination of the choice, and the discontent in the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction semantically construed? To address this, the

subsequent analysis will synthesize the resonance mechanism from Dialogic Syntax with conceptual frameworks in cognitive linguistics and the philosophy of mind, ultimately constructing a construal mechanism grounded in the parallel resonance between the “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” constituents.

4. The Construal Mechanism of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” Construction

By integrating resonance of Dialogic Syntax with key

concepts including event integration, cognitive prominence, and intentionality, we propose the construal mechanism for “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V construction” (hereafter abbreviated as CM), as illustrated in Figure 2.

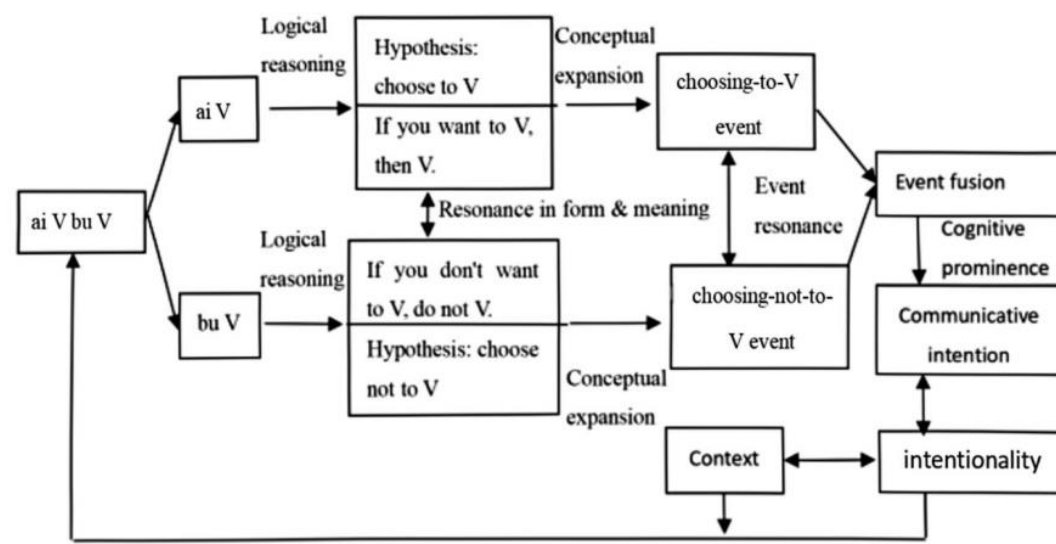


Figure 2. The Construal Mechanism of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction.

4.1. Description of CM

CM can be briefly described as: within a specific context, under the dominance of intentionality, “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction decomposes into the “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” parts. The parallel juxtaposition of “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” contributes to the logical reasoning of its reductive structures, so that the reductive structure “if you want to V, then V” and “if you don’t want to V, don’t V” are established. The parallel mapping in the construction leads to a form resonance between two parts based on the syntactic structure “if X, then X”. Formal resonance triggers meaning resonance which embodies the hypothesis of opposites in the construction. The two opposing meanings provide metonymic access to the corresponding event [22] (P. 50) [10] (P. 24) through conceptual expansion [24] (P. 112) [27] (P. 145) [30] (P. 16-17). In this way, two corresponding events, choosing-to-V event and choosing-not-to-V event, are established. This provides meanings of selection to the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction. The strong contrast and clash between events activate event resonance. The resonance of the two events provides a conceptual basis for event integration. In the process of event integration, the conception of an event is highlighted according to the speaker’s intention, and this process is cognitive prominence [15] (P. 66-73) [16] (P. 148-152) [42] (P. 391-392); And these highlighted and foreground parts reflect the speaker’s inclination of choice. Depending

on the context, if the party involved acts contrary to this inclination, the speaker’s words carry a strong sense of discontent. In summary, CM leverages the parallel resonance between the two constituents “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” of the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction to establish two selection options (“choosing-to-V event” vs. “choosing-not-to-V event”) that embody the meaning of selection. Through cognitive prominence operations, CM expresses the inclination of the choice between these options, thereby conveying specific pragmatic information.

4.2. Elucidation of CM

4.2.1. Intentionality as the Dominant Factor

The “intentionality” of the speaker governs the entire construal process of the “(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction, serving as the top-level design of the aforementioned CM. Intentionality refers to the “directedness” of consciousness [31] (P. 1) [44, 45]. Specifically, human consciousness is always oriented toward an object, establishing it as the focus or intention. This referential capacity (aboutness) constitutes the essence of intentionality. As linguistic communication represents a form of conscious activity, intentionality—the core of such activity—functions as both the origin and ultimate purpose of linguistic behavior [45]. Therefore, intentionality initiates the conscious operation embodied in the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction and permeates its entire process. This

intentionality operates through two dimensions: intentional content (the conceptual focus of consciousness) and intentional attitude (the evaluative stance toward that content). In construing the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction, selecting between the V and non-V options constitutes the intentional content, while the speaker’s evaluative stance toward this selection manifests the intentional attitude. The full interpretation of this construction requires deducing both the speaker’s intentional content and intentional attitude, thereby reconstructing communicative intentions that convey negative emotions (discontent, disdain, indifference, etc.), all constrained by intentionality. In essence, the entire construal process of the 爱(ai)V 不(bu)V construction is intentionally driven.

4.2.2. Logical Reasoning as the Premise

Through logical deduction, the two parallel constituents “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V” of the 爱(ai)V 不(bu)V construction can be reconstructed into two antithetical hypothetical complex sentences: “如果爱(ai)V 就(jiu)V” (“If you want to V, then V”) and “如果不(bu)爱(ai)V 就不(bu)V” (“If you don’t want to V, then don’t V”). This reconstruction process is grounded in the paratactic nature of Chinese, where the omitted connective 如果 就 (“if...then...”) can be readily restored through contextual inference. To explicate this process, we address two critical questions: 1) How is the “爱(ai)V” constituent reconstructed into 如果爱(ai)V 就(jiu)V? 2) How is the 不(bu)V constituent reconstructed into “如果不(bu)爱(ai)V 就不(bu)V”?

Jin Yuelin [14] (P. 107) establishes the logical principle: “If the existence of condition p guarantees the existence of q, then p constitutes the sufficient condition for q.” Applying this principle to our analysis: “爱(ai)V” (“willingness to V”) serves as the sufficient condition for V. The relationship can be formalized as: 爱(ai)V \Rightarrow V (logical implication). Thus, we derive the reconstructed form: 爱(ai)V \rightarrow 如果爱(ai)V 就(jiu)V.

Jin Yuelin [14] (P. 107) further clarifies: “If the absence of condition p necessitates the absence of q, then p constitutes the necessary condition for q.” Applying this principle to our analysis: “不(bu)爱(ai)V” (“unwillingness to V”) serves as the necessary condition for “不(bu)V”. The relationship can be formalized as: 不(bu)V \Rightarrow 不(bu)爱(ai)V (logical contrapositive). Thus, we derive the reconstructed form: 不(bu)V \rightarrow 如果不(bu)爱(ai)V 就不(bu)V.

4.2.3. Conceptual Expansion as the Pathway

Conceptual expansion, a cognitive operation that extends conceptual categories through part-to-whole metonymic relationships [24] (P. 112) [27] (P. 145) [29] (P. 19) [30] (P. 16-17), bridges the gap between the reconstructed hypothet-

ical complex sentences of the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction and their corresponding event representations. In the process of construal, two resonant events, namely “choosing-to-V event” and “choosing-not-to-V event”, provide the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction with meanings of selection. These two events are established through conceptual expansion, a cognitive operation related to the expansion of conceptual categories that involves a metonymy from part to whole. The cognitive process of conceptual expansion is necessary to construct the corresponding events from the two reduced structures of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V”. The reduced structures express two opposing semantic hypotheses: choose to V and choose not to V. These two semantic relations, through conceptual expansion, provide a metonymic access to the corresponding whole events. Specifically, the former, expressing the hypothesis of choosing to V, is a part of choosing-to-V event, and it provides a metonymic access to choosing-to-V event through conceptual expansion. Similarly, the latter, expressing the hypothesis of choosing not to V, is a part of choosing-not-to-V event, and it provides a metonymic access to the choosing-not-to-V event through conceptual expansion. In this way, the choosing-to-V event and the choosing-not-to-V event are established through conceptual expansion.

4.2.4. Parallel Resonance as the Foundation

The syntactic and semantic resonance between the reductive structures of “if you want to V, then V” and “if you don’t want to V, then do not V” facilitates the establishment of two corresponding events, endowing the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction with meanings of selection. Moreover, the resonance between these two events provides a conceptual foundation for event integration and cognitive prominence.

Resonance, as defined by Du Bois [6] (P. 359-360), refers to the catalytic activation of analogy or contrast between utterances or structures. The reductive structures of “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V”—“if you want to V, then V” and “if don’t want to V, then do not V”—exhibit syntactic resonance due to their shared syntactic framework of “if X, then X”, which triggers a formal resonance that subsequently highlights a meaningful resonance, namely, a set of hypothesis with opposing meanings. This set of opposing meanings establishes two corresponding events through conceptual expansion: the event of choosing to V and the event of choosing not to V, both of which fall within the realm of intentional content. These two events contribute to meanings of selection inherent in “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V”. The stark contrast between affirmation and negation within these events activates event resonance, which, in turn, provides a conceptual basis for event integration [38] (P. 213) [11] (P. 84-85). During the process of event integration, the speaker selects between the event of choosing-to-V and the event of choosing-not-to-V through cognitive prominence, reflecting an intentional attitude.

4.2.5. Cognitive Prominence as the Crux

Two resonant events provide two options as meanings of selection for “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction. But how to choose, that is, the inclination of choice, is realized through cognitive prominence.

In terms of linguistic form, the speaker presents a single proposition in the four-character construction “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V”. through contraction and omission based on the principle of economy in linguistic communication [13]; in terms of conceptual content, the speaker utilizes an event integration mechanism to merge the two resonant events of choosing-to-V and choosing-not-to-V into a single integrated event. These two events provide two corresponding options A and B as meanings of selection for “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction (A represents choosing-to-V event and B represents choosing-not-to-V event). During the process of event integration, the speaker makes different choices among options A and B based on their expressive intention, choosing A, choosing B, or making no choice. Choosing A or B is an inclination, while not choosing refers to the speaker has no obvious preference for choosing A or B, merely offering two options and leaving the choice to the party involved. So, how is this inclination in choice expressed? We believe it is through cognitive prominence [15] (P. 66-73) [16] (P. 148-152) [42] (P. 391-392). During the process of event integration, the speaker foregrounds A or B to highlight, expressing the inclination of choice and conveying their intention; the speaker can also choose not to highlight either, leaving the choice to the other party. In other words, for the speaker, choosing A or B is feasible, that is, a non-preferential choice.

5. Exemplary Analysis of CM

The following case study applies the proposed CM to analyze the inclined selection meaning in the 爱(ai)V 不(bu)V construction, demonstrating CM’s operational validity.

(9) 她回来后说: “……噢, 你去到我宿舍把我的箱子拿来。”我说: “你的东西, 你去拿。”“瞎说! 我这个样子能拿得出来吗? 你爱去不去, 反正拿来是你用。”

王小波《2015》

ta huilai hou shuo: “……o, ni qudao wo sushe ba wo de xiangzi nalai.” wo shuo: “ni de dongxi, ni qu na.”

“xia shuo! wo zhege yangzi neng na de chulai ma? ni ai qu bu qu, fanzheng nalai shi ni yong.”

wang xiao bo «2015»

After her returned, she said, “... Oh, go to my dorm and fetch my suitcase.” I replied, “If it’s your stuff, you should fetch it.” “Nonsense! How can I fetch it in this state? Whether you go or not is up to you—it’s for you to use anyway.”

From Xiaobo Wang’s 2015

Overnight, the couple transformed and swapped genders.

The transformed wife asked her husband to go to her dormitory and fetch her suitcase. The husband, who was not used to being in the wife’s body, outright refused her request and told her to get it herself. The wife argued that since she was now in the husband’s body, she couldn’t possibly fetch it. Consequently, she became very angry and uttered the construction, “爱去不去 ai qu bu qu”(if you want to fetch the suitcase, then fetch it; if you don’t want to fetch the suitcase, don’t fetch it”).

In the following part, “爱 (ai) V 不 (bu) V” construction is interpreted by CM:

- 1) To reduce the construction: The construction “爱去不去 ai qu bu qu” can be decomposed into two parts: “爱去 ai qu” and “不去 bu qu”. The parallel juxtaposition between two parts facilitates the logical reasoning towards its reduced structure, resulting in the establishment of the reductive forms “if you want to fetch the suitcase, then fetch it” and “if you don’t want to fetch the suitcase, don’t fetch it”.
- 2) To construct corresponding events: The syntactic parallelism in the reductive structure activates a syntactic resonance based on the “if X, then X” pattern among the structures. This syntactic resonance triggers a semantic resonance, which manifests as the oppositional hypotheses between the structures: “if you want to fetch the suitcase, then fetch it” and “if you don’t want to fetch the suitcase, don’t fetch it”. Each of these meanings provides a metonymic access point to the corresponding events through conceptual expansion. “If you want to fetch the suitcase, then fetch it” opens a metonymic access to the event “choosing to fetch the suitcase”, and similarly, “if you don’t want to fetch the suitcase, don’t fetch it” opens an access to the event “choosing not to fetch the suitcase”. Based on this, the events “choosing to fetch the suitcase” and “choosing not to fetch the suitcase” are established. These two events endow “爱去不去 ai qu bu qu” with meanings of selection.
- 3) To be clear about the communicative intention: “Choosing to fetch the suitcase” and “choosing not to fetch the suitcase” strongly contrast and conflict with each other, activating event resonance. The resonating events provide two corresponding options as meanings of selection for “爱去不去 ai qu bu qu” construction: “choosing to fetch the suitcase” and “choosing not to fetch the suitcase.” At the same time, they also lay the conceptual foundation for the next step of event integration. During the integration of the two events, the wife highlights the option of “choosing to fetch the suitcase,” foregrounding it to express her inclination. At this moment, the wife’s intentionality is concertized into a clear intent, which is for her husband to fetch the suitcase. The wife wants her husband to fetch the suitcase, but he is unwilling to do so; therefore, her speech carries tones of anger and discontent.

6. Conclusion

This study provides CM for “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction based on the parallel resonance between its two constituents “爱(ai)V” and “不(bu)V”. The dialogic resonance between “爱(ai)V” (“willingness to V”) and “不(bu)V” (“unwillingness to V”) drives logical deduction, enabling their reconstruction into two antithetical hypothetical complex sentences: “如果爱(ai)V 就(jiu)V” (“If you want to V, then V”) and “如果不(bu)爱(ai)V 就不(bu)V” (“If you don’t want to V, then don’t V”). The syntactic parallelism of these sentences (via the shared syntactic frame 如果 X 就 X (If X, then X)) activates formal resonance, which in turn triggers semantic resonance—the emergence of opposing hypothetical relations. Through conceptual expansion, these opposing relations construct two corresponding events: choosing-to-V event and choosing-not-to-V event, whose inherent conflict activates event resonance. This resonance generates the construction’s core semantic value: presenting two mutually exclusive options. During event integration, speakers employ cognitive prominence to foreground their preferred option, thereby encoding communicative intentions.

Given that symmetry-preference constitutes a fundamental cultural “gene” in Chinese cognition, and considering the prevalence of parallel structures like 你来我往 (“reciprocal interactions”), 桃花细逐杨花落, 黄鸟时兼白鸟飞 (“Peach blossoms chase willow catkins in descent; Yellow birds flit alongside white ones in flight”), and conceptual hybrids like 薛定谔的猫, 王小波的猪 (“Schrödinger’s Cat, Wang Xiaobo’s Pig”), CM not only explains the “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V” construction’s meaning but also provides a replicable framework for analyzing analogous parallel structures in Chinese linguistics and beyond.

Abbreviations

CM Construal Mechanism for “爱(ai)V 不(bu)V Construction”

Author Contributions

Liying Sun: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Mengjie Zhang: Data curation, Writing – review & editing

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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