

Discussion on the Construction of New Media Language “XX Ben X”

Saichen Niu

Abstract—The new construction of new media language “XX běn X” has a fixed structure, consisting of the constant term “běn” and two variables “XX” and “X”. Its initial construction “kě'ài běn ài” comes from “kě'ài běnrén”, indicating that this construction directly comes from the expansion of “referring to person nouns/personal pronouns + běnrén”. The expansion of “běn NP” affects its construction changes. The Chinese characters/syllables of the variable “X” are selected from the components of the variable “XX”. The selection mechanism is determined by semantic and prosodic factors, with semantic factors taking precedence. The variable “XX” can be general nouns, proper nouns and adjectives, mostly new media language words referring to a certain type of people, with high productivity. “XX běn X” means that the reference object is the typical “XX”, which is often used to evaluate in an exaggerated manner, and has strong resonance in the new media language community.

Index Terms—“XX běn X”, construction, change of construction, “běn NP”.

I. INTRODUCTION

“XX běn X” is a very popular phrase form on the Internet in recent years, such as “kě'ài(adorable) běn ài”, “zhìzhàng(moron) běn zhàng”, “xìjīng(drama queen) běn jīng”, “gàngjīng(contrarian) běn gàng”, “yángóu(someone who treats good-looking people especially well) běn góu”, etc., It appears frequently in various new media networks, mostly in the form of “AB běn A/B”, and in the meaning it has the typical or emphasized meaning of “XX”. “XX běn X”, as a sentence pattern that can be directly applied, has been included as a Baidu entry. Different from some short-lived Internet words, “XX běn X” has a deep language foundation and a broad space for development. This paper tries to discuss the formation, evolution, and development of this construction.

II. THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF “XX BÈN X”

The structure of “XX běn X” is fixed and consists of the constant item “běn” and two variable items “XX” and “X”. E.g.:

1) Wǒ hǎo xīhuān Wēn Kèxíng hé Chén Chángshēng de lǎláng, liǎngge dōu shì dà měirén, yángǒu shèng yàn, Chén Chángshēng zhēnde shì wēnróu běn wēn. (I really like Wen Kexing and Chen Changsheng's Lalang, both of them are beauties, Chen Changsheng is really wēnróu(tender) běn wēn.) (Sina Weibo, Tǔ* 2021-6-11).

Manuscript received January 31, 2022, and revised August 8, 2022.

Saichen Niu is with Fudan University, China (e-mail: 19300110007@fudan.edu.cn).

This example uses “wēnróu běn wēn” to emphasize that Chen Changsheng's temperament is quite soft, which makes people feel very warm and considerate.

According to Goldberg's definition [1], the structure of any language, in terms of its form or function, can be regarded as a construction as long as it cannot be strictly predicted from its constituent parts or other known constructions. For some language structures that can be completely predicted, as long as they appear frequently enough, they can also be classified into the category of constructions. Therefore, it can be seen that “XX běn X”, as a new media language, should be a very expressive construction [2].

After searching on the Internet, it can be found that some people believe that this construction originated from the “kě'ài běnrén”, and some researchers also agree with this statement. According to the origin of “běnrén”(oneself) for a long time, the use of anaphora began in the Yuan and Ming dynasties, and the usage of “referring to person nouns/personal pronouns + běnrén” came into being, such as “If you sue in his (tā běnrén de) hands, he must be fair handling, it can no longer be biased.” (Shi Yukun. *Sānxiá Wúyì (Three Heroes and Five Righteousness)* Chapter 47) [3].

“běnrén” is a result of the lexicalization of “běn NP”. “běn NP” itself may also be the source of the construction of “XX běn X”. “běn NP” can include examples such as “běn gōngsī”(this company; our company), “běn chǎnpǐn”(this product), “běnrì”(today), and “běn xiǎojiě”(lit. this lady; referring the speaker oneself to a honorable young lady), among which “běn” may have the meaning of “this” or “we/our”. Among them, “běn + identity” in the old times also contained a kind of cognition on the difference of social status, such as “běn xiǎojiě” and “běn tàiyé(old man)”, indicating that the speaker has a superior sense of identity. This form of “běn + identity” can also be seen in the language of today's new media, such as “běn yīxuéshēng(medical students)”, but the superiority of the identity is not so obvious anymore.

The “běn” in “běn NP” is a demonstrative pronoun. From a diachronic perspective, the core meaning of “běn” in ancient Chinese is “fundamental”, and there are many uses of “běn NP”, meaning “fundamental NP”. The Han Dynasty began to have many usages of “běn + area/location” (such as “běn guó(state)” and “běn zhōu(prefecture)”, which inherited the previous usage of “běn NP”, meaning “(indicating the speaker's location) + NP”, Later, “NP” expanded from area/location nouns to people and time [4]. Therefore, “běnrén” is often used as a self-proclaimed speaker after being solidified into a word, and it can also refer to the person concerned or the person mentioned above. This is also used in modern Chinese, and it is often used in formal styles, such as “běnrén yǐ zhīxǐ” (I have acknowledged).

As mentioned above, “běnrén” is not limited to the first

person, but also used in the second person and the third person. At this time, it is often necessary to use the antecedent to make it clear, such as “respect *the patient himself* (*běnrén*)’s wishes” and “Parsons believes that a person’s career must be combined with *his own* (*qí běnrén*)’s interests, abilities and personality”. This usage originates from the empathetic pragmatics of “*běnrén*”, which extends from the first person to other persons. At this time, the semantics of “this” are enhanced while the semantics of “we” disappear [5]. This is an independent development of the word “*běnrén*”.

Nowadays, there are still expressions like “*kě’ài běnrén*” (adorable oneself) on the Internet, such as:

2) Gǎnxiè nǚ’é zài yíng lǐ zhèduàn shíjiān tígōng de zhème duō kě’ài sùcái! Nǐ jiùshì kě’ài běnrén. Yíhòu de měi yītiān dōu yào zhème kǎixīn!! (Thanks to my daughter for providing so many lovely materials during her time in the camp! You are *kě’ài běnrén*, and you will be so happy every day from now on!!) (Sina Weibo Ān* 2021-4-17)

3) Nàyīng chēng Zhōu Bǐchàng wéi lǎoshī, yǒu shuí zhùyì xià tā de fānyìng? Shì kě’ài běnrén méicùo le. (Naying called Zhou Bichang “teacher”; who noticed her unconscious reaction? She is *kě’ài běnrén* without doubt.) (Sina Weibo T* 2021-3-22)

4) Biǎozhū de lǐxiǎng bùzhǐ yào kuàizǐ yòng de hǎo, hái yào fūhé yìxià xījié, qíqíguàiguài, kěkěàitài běnrén. (Biaozhu’s ideal type is not limited to using chopsticks well, it’s also including the following details. Quite strange, kěkěàitài(Quite adorable) *běnrén*)

“*kě’ài běnrén*” should be an extension of “referring to person nouns/personal pronouns + *běnrén*”, just like the example of “*the patient běnrén*” mentioned above, using “*the patient*” to modify the referent of “*běnrén*”, “*kě’ài běnrén*” “is the use of “*kě’ài*” to modify the referent of “*běnrén*”, so this extension closely linked with pragmatics. From a semantic point of view, the “*kě’ài běnrén*” emphasizes that the referent is a typical representative of the attribute of “*kě’ài*”, the previous “personal pronoun + *běnrén*” (such as “*qí běnrén*”) naturally does not have this semantics, and “referring to person nouns + *běnrén*” (such as “*the patient běnrén*”) adds the character attribute, but it does not reach the level of indicating that “the object of reference is a typical representative of this attribute”, but the meaning of “*kě’ài běnrén*” can reach this level. Therefore, “*kě’ài běnrén*” is an extension of “referring to person nouns/personal pronouns + *běnrén*”.

It can be seen from the Internet that the “*kě’ài běnrén*” slowly developed the “*kě’ài běn ài*”, replacing the “*rén*” with the “*ài*” in “*kě’ài*”, and the overall structure did not change much from the previous stage; thus, came out the “XX *běn X*” construction.

III. THE CONSTRUCTION CHANGE OF “XX *BĚN X* “ AND THE SELECTION MECHANISM OF “X”

The “XX *běn X*” construction has a relatively high degree of schematization. The variable “X” is not completely free, only limited to one Chinese character/syllable, and restricted by “XX”. In general, a Chinese character/syllable filled in “X” is derived from a word filled in “XX”, such as “*xiányú*(loser) *běn xián*”, “*xiányú běn yú*”, “*Hāmùlèitè*(Hamlet) *běn tè*”, etc.

The first example of the construction of “XX *běn X*” was “*kě’ài běn ài*”, then “*xījīng běn jīng*”, “*gāngà*(embarrassing) *běn gà*” etc. appeared, and then “*kě’ài běn kě*” and “*xiānnǚ*(fairy) *běn xiān*” appeared, which belongs to the change after construction, namely construction change. In the form of change, “XX *běn X*” can be “A(BCD) *běn A/B/D*” (A/B/C/D is a single Chinese character/syllable). Based on experience and small-scale investigation, most instances of “XX *běn X*” are “AB *běn B*”, that is, “XX” is a two-syllable word and “X” is the second syllable of “XX”. There are exceptions, for individual two-syllable words, “AB *běn A*” is more than “AB *běn B*”. For example, for the two-syllable word “*xiānnǚ*”, Search results on Sina Weibo show that there are 898 entries for “*xiānnǚ běn xiān*” (“AB *běn A*”) and 582 entries for “*xiānnǚ běn nǚ*” (“AB *běn B*”). In order to analyze the selection of “X”, I searched Sina Weibo based on 12 high-frequency two-syllable words filled in “XX”, and the statistical results are as following Table I:

TABLE I: THE DISTRIBUTION OF “AB *BĚN A*” AND “AB *BĚN B*”

Word	“AB <i>běn A</i> ”	“AB <i>běn B</i> ”
yángòu	0.0%	100.0%
gāngà	4.1%	95.9%
qīngxǐng (sober)	7.6%	92.4%
zhìzhàng	9.0%	91.0%
zhínán (straight)	11.3%	88.7%
xījīng	13.9%	86.1%
wēnnuǎn (considerable)	25.2%	74.8%
gàngjīng	26.7%	73.3%
xiányú	41.0%	59.0%
kě’ài	42.1%	57.9%
fěiwù (incompetent)	53.9%	46.1%
xiānnǚ	60.7%	39.3%

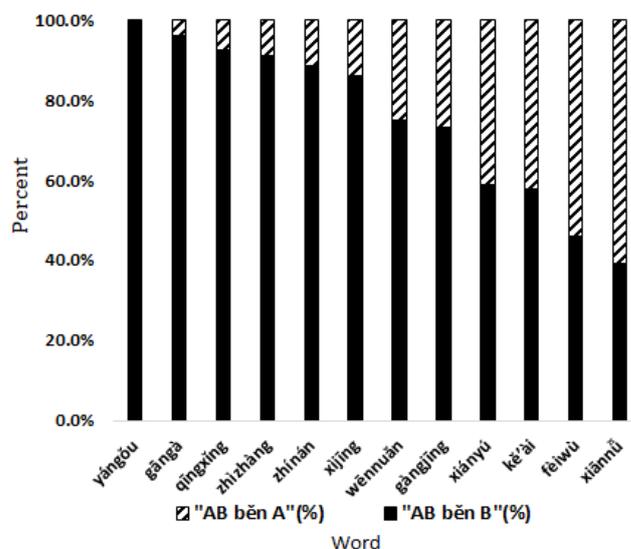


Fig. 1. The distribution of “AB *běn A*” and “AB *běn B*”.

It can be seen that when the selected words other than “*fěiwù*” and “*xiānnǚ*” are filled in the “XX *běn X*” construction, “AB *běn B*” is used more than “AB *běn A*”. On

the whole, the ratio of “X” to “B” is higher than that of “A”, so that the formed “AB běn B” is more harmonious in rhythm, and both steps fall on the same syllable “B” (for example, “zhìzhàng běn zhàng”, “xìjīng běn jīng”). Such natural rhythm is a factor of which Chinese character/syllable in “XX” is selected by “X”.

When the meanings of the components in “XX” are not much different or are almost equally important, the role of natural rhythm will be play, such as “wēnnuǎn”, “qīngxǐng” and other combined adjectives. A few words, such as “fèiwù” and “xiānnǚ” show the tendency of “AB běn A” to be stronger than “AB běn B”, which shows that semantic factors (the degree of emphasis on “fèi” and “xiān”) can override prosodic factors.

Because “běn X” can refer to typical people, the morphemes in “XX” that carry the semantics that the speaker wants to emphasize more are entered into “X”. This is not only the motivation for the replacement of “rén” by “X” in “XX běn X”, and it is also an important factor in which Chinese character/syllable in “XX” is selected by “X”. In new media language communication, people will decide which Chinese character/syllable in “XX” to choose according to their different semantic needs, for example:

5) Wǒ dōu yīnggāi shì yīgè fēicháng fēicháng gàngjīng de rén. Dōu bú shì gàngjīng běn jīng, shì gàngjīng běn gàng jiǎnzhí. wǒ de cúnzài jiùshì yīgēn héngzhe de gàng. (I am very of gàngjīng. I am not the gàngjīng běn jīng, I am the gàngjīng běn gàng. My existence is a horizontal gàng.) (Sina Weibo Q* 2021-4-26)

The speaker uses both “gàngjīng běn jīng” and “gàngjīng běn gàng”, and thinks “gàngjīng běn gàng” has a deeper meaning than “gàngjīng běn jīng”. The following text also compares himself to “a horizontal lever(gàng)”. This example illustrates the choice of “X” and its semantic relation in the construction.

It can also be seen from the above examples that the syllables filled in “X” are not necessarily morphemes of noun, such as “fèi” in “fèiwù běn fèi”. Moreover, this morpheme and “běn” even produce an instance of “běn X” that can independently enter into a sentence, such as:

6) Wǒ de diǎnfēng zhànli yě zài chūzhōng le, wúshímiǎo zuóyòu fùyuán, ér xiànzài běn fèi lián gōngshì dōu wàngle. (My peak combat power was in junior high school, recovered in about 50 seconds, and now běn fèi forgot even the formula.) (Sina Weibo Jia*2021-6-9)

In this example, “běn fèi” can be seen as a further expansion of “běn NP”, emphasizing that I am now like a trash.

To sum up, the combination of prosodic and semantic factors becomes the selection mechanism of “X”, and “běn NP” plays a role in the change of its construction, so that “běn X” can be included in sentences independently.

IV. THE CONSTRUCTION MEANING OF “XX BEN X” AND ITS PRODUCTIVITY

A. The Construction Meaning of “XX běn X”

“Constructional meaning is the meaning of the construction; it is formed by projecting the image schemas of

human cognitive domain into the language. “It takes root in speaker’s subjective understanding of particular context. The “XX běn X” construction often appears in critical contextual expressions, reflecting subjectivity and evaluation. To express the speaker's opinion on a certain thing, phenomenon or person, it can generally be divided into positive evaluations with confirmation and praise, and derogatory comments with complaints and ridicule.

Examples of positive evaluations with confirmation or praise:

7) Yīgè xiào qílái jiùshì Hǎimián bǎobao běn bǎo de yīshēng. (A doctor who smiles as Hǎimián bǎobao(SpongeBob) běn bǎo.) (Sina Weibo Míng* 2021-3-13)

8) #rénlèi yòuzǎi yuèdú shí yǒu duō kě`ài #hahahahahahaha kě`ài běn kě, wǒ xiǎoshìhòu yě shì zhèyàng lǎng dude. (# There is how cute when young children reading# ha ha, kě`ài běn kě, I read it like this when I was a kid.) (Sina Weibo Quán* 2021-4-27)

9) Jīntiān kěyǐ shuōshì jīnlǐ běn lǐ le, méi xiǎngdào kěyǐ bèi Hàogē xuānshàng tái,zhànzài tā pángbiān zhēn hǎo jīnzhāng. (Today can be said to be jīnlǐ běn lǐ, I did not expect to be personally selected by Haoge on the stage, standing next to him is really nervous.) (Sina Weibo Huáng* 2019-5-29)

10) Liú Shìshī chuān shā qún zhēn de jiùshì xiānnǚ běn xiān le, pífū zhuàngtài hǎohǎo, qìzhì zhēn de tài hǎole ba.(Liu Shishi wearing a gauze skirt is really like a xiānnǚ(fairy) běn xiān, the skin is good, and the temperament is really well.) (Sina Weibo Yú* 2022-4-6)

11) Wǒ gē jiùshì wēnróu běn róu shànliáng běn shàn wēnnuǎn běn nuǎn yángguāng běn guāng, zǒngzhī, tā shì shìjiè shàng zuì hǎo de shuàigē. (My brother is wēnróu(tender) běn róu shànliáng(kindness) běn shàn wēnnuǎn(considerable) běn nuǎn yángguāng(sunny) běn guāng, Anyway, he is the best handsome guy in the world.) (Sina Weibo Lǐ* 2021-8-26)

Examples of derogatory evaluations with spit or ridicule:

12) “Měitiān zhǐ zhīdào shuā shǒujī, nándào bù yīnggāi duō dúshū ma?” “Yòu làngfèi le yītiān, nǐ lí zìjǐ de mèngxiǎng gèng jìnle ma?” xiányú běn yú gǎnjué yǒu bèi nèihán dào (“You only know surfing by your mobile phone every day, shouldn’t you read more books?”, “Another day is wasted, Are you closer to your dream?” Xiányú běn yú feels that this is talking about himself.) (Sina Weibo Wēi* 2021-3-29)

13) Lǎoyǒujì friends Qiáoyī nǐ zhēn shì zhìzhàng běn zhàng, xuézhā dǐ zhā a--- Fēibǐ yào tídāole (Friends Joey, you are really zhìzhàng běn zhàng, you are a bad scorer ---Phoebe is going to pick up the knife.) (Bilibili video title Yuè* 2019-11-22)

14) Jiùmìng a, wǒ shì gāngà běn gà ba, shàng cì kàn yáyī yīshēng shì wǒ gāozhōng tóngxué, zhè cì kàn diányǐng pángbiān zuòzhe wǒ qián nányǒu. (Help! I must be gāngà(awkward) běn gà. Last time I went to dentist, and the dentist was my high school classmate. This time my ex-boyfriend sat next to me in the movie theater.) (Sina Weibo cóng* 2021-5-29)

15) Tèlǎngpǔ shèmiǎn gǎn`ēn jié huǒ jī, là me, shuí lái shèmiǎn Tèlǎngpǔ? Dāngxià, zuì xūyào bèi shèmiǎn de shì Tèlǎngpǔ běn pǔ, ér bùshì huǒjī běn jī. Tèlǎngpǔ yǐjīng ànshì

yǐ jiù, BÀI dēng lèng shì jiǎzhuāng méi míngbai! (Trump pardoned the Thanksgiving turkey, then, who will pardon Trump? At the moment, it is *Tèlǎngpǔ běn pǔ*, not *huōjī běn jī*, who needs to be pardoned the most. Trump has been hinting for a long time, and Biden just pretended not to understand!) (Sina Weibo Qián* 2020-11-25)

16) Fǎnguān wǒ zìjǐ, shēngqì de shíhòu gēn rén chǎojià bāichě jǐjù jiù jīdòng, ránhòu jiù huì gěngyè kū qílái, zhēn de huì yǔwúlúncì, měicì shíhòu juéde zìjǐ shì *fěiwù běn wù*. (On the other hand, when I am angry, I get excited when I argue with people and break a few words, and then I will choke up and cry, really incoherent, and every time I feel myself like a *fěiwù běn wù*) (Sina Weibo Xī* 2021-1-31)

These use cases have distinct evaluation and subjectivity, and exaggerate the referents as typical representatives of “XX”. It is more intense in expressing emotion than the original word. If “*kě’ài běn kě*” and “*kě’ài*” are used to describe people respectively, it is obvious that “*kě’ài běn kě*” expresses a deeper degree of emotion and is more “*kě’ài(cute)*”. Example (9) uses “*jīnlǐ běn lǐ*”, Express a stronger sense of luck than “*jīnlǐ(luck)*”, Excitement jumped to the surface. For another example (13), the speaker exaggerated Joey as the incarnation of “*zhìzhàng*”, indicating that he thought Joey had a very low IQ. And consider on example (16), it is a deep expression of one's own incompetence, using examples to illustrate himself as more “*fěiwù(fool)*” than *fěi wù(incompetent)*. These examples all use the word construct of “XX Ben X” to make exaggerated evaluations of themselves or others and things, Express the ultimate meaning, or praise, or emphasis, or ridicule. It is particularly popular in new media languages, still trending on various social media platforms today.

B. The Productivity of “XX běn X”

Productivity is also known as creativity; Linguist John Lyon defines it as: “The ability that we all have to construct and understand an infinitely large number of sentences that we never heard before.” It has 2 characteristics: 1) The number of elements and rules in the system is limited; 2) The number and length of utterances the system call produce is infinite [6].

For the “XX běn X” construction, both new words in the new media language (such as “*yángǒu*”) and words with new meanings (such as “*xiānnǚ*”) can be entered, because of their commonality and high frequency, they are easy to resonate in the new media community.

The “X” in “XX běn X” can be general nouns, such as example 9), 10), 12), 13), 16), or proper nouns, such as example 7), (15), can also be an adjective, as in example 8), 11), 14).

There are more nouns filled with “XX” than adjectives. Nouns such as “*yángǒu*”, “*zhìzhàng*”, “*zhínán*”, “*xijīng*”, “*gàngjīng*”, “*xiányú*”, “*fěiwù*”, and “*xiānnǚ*” listed in Table I.

The use of words is also a manifestation of people in the new media who are keen to extract certain aspects of the characters for quick facial recognition and evaluation. Adjectives such as “*gān’gà*”, “*qīngxīng*”, “*wēnnuǎn*”, and “*kě’ài*” are also used to describe characters (where “*wēnnuǎn*” means “considerate” and “feel warm”). It can be seen that all words that can enter “XX” must be able to describe/evaluate people. Therefore, the words that are particularly developed in new media language referring to a certain type of people are particularly productive.

V. THE CONCLUSION

At present, construction analysis of new media language in China is relatively few and in its infancy. Therefore, the construction of new media buzzwords can be a research field worthy of attention [7]. This paper mainly makes a preliminary analysis and discussion on the construction process, construction change, construction meaning and productivity of the emerging construction “XX běn X”. In view of the rapidly changing characteristics of new media languages, in-depth study and discussion of the relationship between such construction in different diachronic evolution stages can be carried out in the future.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conducted the research, made the analysis and wrote the paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Saichen Niu thanks teacher Zhao Guojun of The New Media Studies course for his careful guidance!

REFERENCES

- [1] A. E. Goldberg, *Construction: Research on the Construction of Argument Structure*, Beijing, CN: Peking University Press, 2007, p. 4.
- [2] L. Yang, “Analysis of the construction of internet catchword “XX Ben X,” *Journal of Neijiang Normal University*, vol. 34, no. 9, pp. 69-72, Sept. 2019.
- [3] X. P. Yao, “The grammaticalization and subjectivation of ‘Ben Ren,’” *Language Science*, vol. 7, no. 4, pp. 377-381, July 2008.
- [4] X. J. Li, “A discussion on the source of the demonstrative ‘Ben,’” *Language Research*, no. 3, pp. 55-58, 2020.
- [5] S. Y. Zong, “A discussion on the demonstrative word ‘Ben’ and its construction ‘Ben NP,’” *Changjiang Academic*, no. 4, pp. 96-102, 2012.
- [6] Z. L. Hu and R. Q. Liu, *Linguistics Tutorial*, Beijing, China: Peking University Press, 1998.
- [7] J. Zhang, “Ten years of research on Chinese construction grammar,” *Chinese Language Learning*, no. 2, pp. 65-77, Apr. 2013.

Copyright © 2022 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)).