

# Cognitive Study of Chinese Symmetrical Construction "dong X xi Y"

Bingzhuan Peng\*, Zimeng Yao

School of Foreign Languages, Harbin University of Science and Technology, Harbin 150080, Heilongjiang, China

\*Correspondence Author, pengbingzhuan@163.com

**Abstract:** *Since ancient times, China has been pursuing the beauty of symmetry and harmony. As symmetry has gradually become a spiritual pursuit, symmetry is often reflected in everyday expressions, just like the idiom "dong X xi Y" which is used frequently in daily communication. Adopting the methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis, based on Construction Grammar Theory, this study first defined "dong X xi Y" as a symmetrical construction, and proposed a cognitive analysis framework of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" to analyze its constructional meaning, the construction coercion phenomenon contained in it, and its cognitive motivation. Results show that (1) the constructional meaning of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" includes polar construction meaning and critical construction meaning; (2) the "dong X xi Y" construction suppresses the parts of speech and semantics of X and Y; (3) subjectivity is the cognitive motivation of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". The study of the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" is of great importance for the deeper understanding of the internal structure of the construction and its internal complexity, and in the future it is hoped to provide a cognitive reference for similar constructions.*

**Keywords:** Symmetrical Construction "dong X xi Y"; Construction Grammar Theory; Subjectivity.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As we all know, China stresses the symmetry of things. In the field of architectural design, both royal palaces and ordinary residential buildings fully embody the beauty of symmetry. The extensive application of symmetry in architecture reflects the spiritual pursuit of Chinese people. Therefore, in addition to architectural design, symmetry and harmony are also reflected in the Chinese language. Except for classical poetry, the most common language in daily life also reflects the symmetry of language. From zuǒ (left) to yòu (right), from shàng (up) to xià (down), from běi (north) to nán (south), from dōng (east) to xī (west), there is a wonderful beauty in Chinese culture, that is, symmetry. Therefore, as a pair of locative words, dōng (east) and xī (west) frequently appear in pairs and are used in language communication. When dōng (east) and xī (west) appear at the same time, they are usually used to express the polarity meaning in Chinese. "dong X xi Y" appears frequently as a fixed collocation in Chinese, X and Y, as a component of it, has a large number of words that can be filled in Chinese and its semantics cannot be predicted from known components, so it can be regarded as a construction.

Construction grammar theory originated from Fillmore et al.'s study of idioms. They believed that idioms and special expressions can be treated as fixed or relatively fixed combinations of "form and meaning". Later, Goldberg (1995:4) defined construction as the pairing relationship between form and meaning. However, Goldberg (2006:5) revised this definition. Any linguistic form can be regarded as a construction as long as it cannot be predicted from its components or other known constructions in terms of form or function. Construction is also defined as the counterpart of form and function. In addition, according to the high frequency of language pattern, even if its semantics can be completely predicted, it can also be regarded as a construction. Therefore, "dong X xi Y" can be regarded as a construction due to the unpredictability of form and function, and its high frequency in language phenomena. Because of the symmetry between dōng (east) and xī (west), "dong X xi Y" can also be called symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". However, previous studies on a specific idiom are rare. Most scholars focus on relatively large language units. They pay more attention on larger language units in case studies of construction grammar, for example, the construction phenomena in specific sentence patterns such as para-attributive construction, verb object construction, existential construction, etc. Kay and Fillmore (1999:2) used the construction grammar theory to analyze the specific sentence pattern "what's x doing y?". They aimed to reveal the syntactic and semantic features of sentence patterns through the analysis of special grammatical phenomena. Antonopoulou and Nikiforidou (2011:2594) believed that besides sentences, constructions can also be extended to larger language units than sentence, that is, dialogue, and they emphasized the core role of frame semantics in analyzing dialogue constructions. G Brône and Zima (2014:458) believed that dialogue construction is the common cognitive foundation established by speakers. The establishment of dialogue construction would reflect some characteristics of dialogue partners, such as temperament and personality, as well as the views and

attitudes of both parties to the same event, such as agreeing, disagreeing or changing the topic. Zeng (2019:11) advocated that the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of parallel discourse in dialogue should be explained through cognitive construction grammar theory. Other scholars put forward the concept of discourse construction on the basis of sentence and dialogue construction (Östman, 2005; Yuan, 2011; Yuan, 2012; Pan, 2020). Östman (2005:273) first proposed that discourse construction is the result of the joint action of text type and genre. Taking a specific discourse as an example, Pan (2020:111) came to the conclusion that a discourse can be regarded as a large construction, which is composed of phrase construction and syntactic construction.

However, in addition to the large research units of special sentence patterns, dialogues and discourse, in fact, words and phrases should also belong to the research category of construction grammar. Croft (2001:416) once proposed that both words and abstract syntactic and semantic rules can be regarded as constructions. The former was entity construction and the latter was abstract construction. Wang (2005:5) suggested that the grammatical and semantic versatility of words can explain the formation and existence of various constructions in language. Therefore, there must be constructions in words. In a word, construction not only exists in relatively large language units such as sentences, dialogues and discourses, but also in words. But there is little research on the construction grammar of "dong X xi Y". This study attempts to fill the gap in the study of idiom construction by examining symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". This research mainly focuses on the following four aspects: (1) "dong X xi Y" can be defined as construction; (2) the constructional meanings of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y"; (3) the construction coercion phenomena in symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y"; (4) cognitive motivation of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". Since the definition of construction is the pairing relationship between form and meaning, syntax and semantics have always been the focus of scholars' research in the case study of construction grammar. With the redefinition of construction as the pairing relationship between construction and function, based on the research results of syntax and semantics, the study of pragmatic functions of specific constructions has become another focus of research. Therefore, most scholars still analyze the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" from the perspective of traditional syntax, semantics and pragmatics. At present, there is little cognitive research on "dong X xi Y" from the perspective of construction grammar. To reiterate, on the premise that "dong X xi Y" is defined as a construction, the current research attempts to explore the constructional meanings of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y", construction coercion phenomena contained in it and will also focus on the cognitive motivation of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". It is expected that the research results can fill the gap of idiom case studies in construction grammar.

## **2. Conceptual framework**

The concept of construction grammar has attracted the attention of most scholars since it was put forward. Linguists have also shifted their research focus from the meaning of language to the formal level of language. When analyzing the construction meaning of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" and the construction coercion phenomenon contained in it, the formation motivation of the construction can be inferred. Therefore, when analyzing the construction of a particular idiom, this study must take into account the influence of its cognitive motivation.

### **2.1 Construction Grammar**

Construction grammar is a kind of grammar theory that emerged gradually in the late 1980s and is almost suitable for the research methods and schools of the whole language category. By the beginning of the 21st century, there were four variants of construction grammar. The four schools are: Fillmore and Kay et al.'s Construction Grammar, Lakoff and Goldberg's cognitive construction grammar, Langacker's Cognitive Grammar, and Croft's Radical Construction Grammar. This study is based on Goldberg's cognitive construction grammar.

### **2.2 Goldberg's Cognitive Construction Grammar**

Goldberg (1995:4) clearly defined the construction for the first time, construction is a pairing relationship between form and meaning, and the meaning of the whole construction cannot be predicted from its components. But Goldberg (2006:5) later revised the concept and redefined the construction, she argued that any language format should be regarded as a construction as long as some aspects of its form or function cannot be completely predicted from its components or other existing constructions. In addition, even if some language formats can be completely predicted, as long as their frequency is high, these formats should also be regarded as constructions. Therefore, the "dong X xi Y" studied in this paper must also belong to the category of construction. In addition, Goldberg also put forward some basic ideas on cognitive construction grammar: (1) Whenever some aspects of its form or function

can't be fully predicted from its constituent parts or other pre-existing constructions, it should be considered a construction; (2) We can't infer the meaning of an entire construction from the form or meaning of a component; (3) Construction grammar is generative, and it has the characteristics of online generation, solidity and conventionality; (4) the construction is not spontaneous, but acquired; (5) The construction is idiomaticity, as long as a format appears more frequently, it belongs to the category of construction regardless of whether it has conventionality or not; (6) The construction is hierarchical, and each level forms a complete and highly unified system; (7) The formation of construction is based on the generalization of the human brain; (8) As grammatical entities, words and sentences can also be regarded as the two poles of the continuum, and the middle part is the indistinguishable member.

### **2.3 Construction Coercion**

In order to solve the semantic conflict between lexical meaning and structural meaning in construction, the theory of construction coercion is proposed. The meaning of "coercion" in Chinese dictionary is "forced obedience". And the phenomenon of language coercion stems from the diversity of language and the variety of forms and even the unconventional use of language. Goldberg (2006:6) put forward the idea that there is no synonym in grammatical form. Therefore, there may be conflicts between constructions, such as non-standard phonology and syntax, and semantic and pragmatic mismatches. In this case, this study tries to use coercion to explain. When there is a conflict between the morphological syntactic framework of a construction and the entry semantics filled in it, people conduct cognitive coordination on the semantics or structure of the two. This coordination is usually to transform the entry semantics to meet the constraints of the syntactic framework, which leads to the coercion phenomenon (Cui, 2011:59). There are two kinds of coercion in construction, one is stylistic coercion and the other is more common semantic coercion. When the construction is combined with the style, it may force the original situation type to change into another situation type, or make the sentence form change. This is the phenomenon of stylistic coercion. When we regard the time expressed by a sentence as continuous repetition, the event will be suppressed into a state (Yuan, 2010:147). The other kind of semantic coercion is different from this. Semantic coercion actually reflects the symbolic rules, which will have a coercive effect and force the lexical meaning in the construction to change accordingly, so as to achieve semantic harmony through semantic coercion. If an item is semantically incompatible with its morphological and syntactic environment, the meaning of the item should follow the structural meaning embedded in it. That is to say, if a word is semantically incompatible with its syntactic environment, the lexical meaning must follow the meaning of the syntactic structure (Michaelis, 2004:269). It can be seen that no matter whether it is stylistic coercion or semantic coercion, we can understand it in this way, that is, the meaning of a sentence comes from the interaction of construction meaning and lexical meaning. If the construction meaning is consistent with the lexical meaning, the two meanings reinforce each other. If the two meanings conflict with each other, there will be two results: one is that the sentence is conceptually unqualified, and the other is that the construction meaning or lexical meaning takes precedence, thus eliminating the conflict. The elimination of this conflict of meaning is called "coercion" (Li, 2004:14). In a word, the emergence of construction coercion can solve the uncoordinated middle part of construction. The fundamental purpose of constructing the theory of "construction coercion" is to reveal the interaction between various constructions in language. In this thesis, many linguistic phenomena that are difficult to explain by construction will also be explained from the perspective of construction coercion.

### **2.4 Constructional Meaning**

Sentences are the embodiment of construction, and construction has its own overall meaning independent of the components, which cannot be completely deduced from the components. A sentence is not a pile of sentence elements, but a gestalt. The whole is greater than the sum of parts. In a sentence structure, the sum of the meanings of the components may not be able to obtain the overall meaning of the sentence structure. Although the meaning of the components has a great influence on the formation of the overall meaning of the construction, the overall meaning of the construction also restricts the meaning of the components. Therefore, the meaning of construction represents the overall meaning of construction.

### **2.5 Cognitive Motivation**

In addition to the study of the surface meaning of construction, its formation motivation has also been concerned by most scholars. In order to explore the cognitive motivation of construction, some scholars take the formation mechanism of construction as the starting point. Wang (2011:7) made it clear that all language research can be regarded as constructions, and language research should focus on discovering the cognitive mechanism behind

language facts. Then, Shi (2021:1) analyzed the formation process and operation mechanism of construction from three aspects: the view of knowledge, the view of usage and the view of interaction, emphasizing that the analysis of the semantic characteristics of construction needs to be based on the whole and the integration mechanism analysis based on the interactive relationship. After having a full understanding of the formation mechanism of construction, so as to explore the reasons for the formation of construction, some scholars analyze it from the perspective of special sentence patterns. When studying the cognitive motivation of the variant constructions of Chinese and English idioms, Huang (2020:146) found that iconicity and categorization are the manifestations of the construction motivation. Karina and Goldberg (2020:231) put forward new ideas, that is to say, construction is formed in group interaction, but there are individual differences between people. Therefore, unique individuals may shape the usage of language. In summary, it can be seen that the cognitive motivation of different constructions is also different. Iconicity, categorization, subjectivity, metonymy and so on can all become the cognitive motivation of constructions. This study needs to make a specific analysis according to the actual situation. Some special sentence patterns are actually expressions of subjective attribution. The tendency attributed to the agent subject is not objective, but a reflection of the speaker's subjective knowledge (Song, 2005:508). Therefore, taking the sentence pattern "bai X suo ci" as an example, Yang (2022:35) concluded that the cause of its construction meaning is subjectivity, including the speaker's emotion and position. Peng and Yao (2022:136) also believed that subjectivity, as a linguistic feature, can be embedded in construction in the process of communication.

### **3. Constructed analytical framework**

#### **3.1 Cognitive Analysis**

"dong X xi Y" is called symmetrical construction because of its high frequency in Chinese communication, its semantics can't be predicted from the known components and it conforms to symmetrical phenomena. Therefore, this study explains it from the perspective of cognitive construction grammar theory under the category of cognitive linguistics. According to Goldberg (2006:6), the meaning of construction is holistic. Therefore, the construction meaning of "dong X xi Y" has nothing to do with X and Y, but is related to different contexts. "dong" and "xi" belong to two corresponding orientations in Chinese. Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that "dong X xi Y" can represent the constructional meaning of polarity. In addition, "dong" and "xi", as words in opposite directions, should also mean erratic and mindless in some contexts, so it can be inferred that "dong X xi Y" can also mean the constructional meaning of criticism. However, in some cases, when a word item in "dong X xi Y" is semantically incompatible with its syntactic environment, coercion will occur, making the meaning of the word item subject to the constructional meaning. It is precisely because of this coercion phenomenon that "X" and "Y" will change their grammatical and semantic properties before entering the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" to make them meet the needs of the "dong X xi Y" construction. Therefore, the author believes that the "dong X xi Y" construction will suppress the part of speech and semantics of "X" and "Y".

#### **3.2 Cognitive Motivation**

Cognitive motivation refers to the internal process or internal psychological activities that stimulate individuals to conduct cognitive behavior. In the "dong X xi Y" construction, it refers to the internal driving force that forms this construction. It is well known that people will contain their subjective attitudes in the process of communication. British linguist Lyons (1977:739) proposed that subjectivity refers to such a feature of language, that is, the expression of the speaker's "self" is always more or less contained in the discourse. Therefore, the adoption of the construction is also the result of subjectivity. In addition, metonymy, as a way of thinking for people to understand the world, also plays an important role in the cognitive process of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". Metonymy is not only a reflection of human general cognitive ability, but also an important mechanism of syntactic construction. Moreover, metonymy is closely related to the environment, and the use of metonymy varies in different contexts. Therefore, we need to take the embodiment into account in the cognitive motivation. In fact, the constructional meaning of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" is also shaped by the body and its activity mode. Therefore, this paper argues that subjectivity, metonymy and embodiment can all be regarded as the cognitive motivation of symmetric construction "dong X xi Y".

#### **3.3 Framework for Cognitive Analysis of Chinese Symmetrical Construction "dong X xi Y"**

Based on the theory of construction grammar, combined with the cognitive analysis and cognitive motivation analysis of construction, this study proposes a cognitive analysis framework of symmetrical construction "dong X

xi Y", which includes the construction meaning of symmetric construction "dong X xi Y", the construction coercion phenomenon in symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" and the cognitive motivation of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y".

First of all, based on the construction grammar theory, the cognitive construction grammar theory proposed by Goldberg, a branch of it, is obtained and used as the theoretical basis of this study. Then, the author deduces two different construction meanings of the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y": the polar construction meaning and the critical construction meaning, analyzes them and demonstrates them with examples from the corpus. Then, in order to explain the semantic conflict in symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y", the author begins to analyze the coercion implied in symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". The analysis of coercion includes two aspects: part of speech coercion and semantic coercion. Finally, combining the meaning of construction and the phenomenon of construction coercion, the author proposes that the cognitive motivations of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" include subjectivity, metonymy and embodiment. The author explains the cognitive motivation of subjectivity from three aspects, including speaker's perspective, speaker's affective and speaker's cognition.

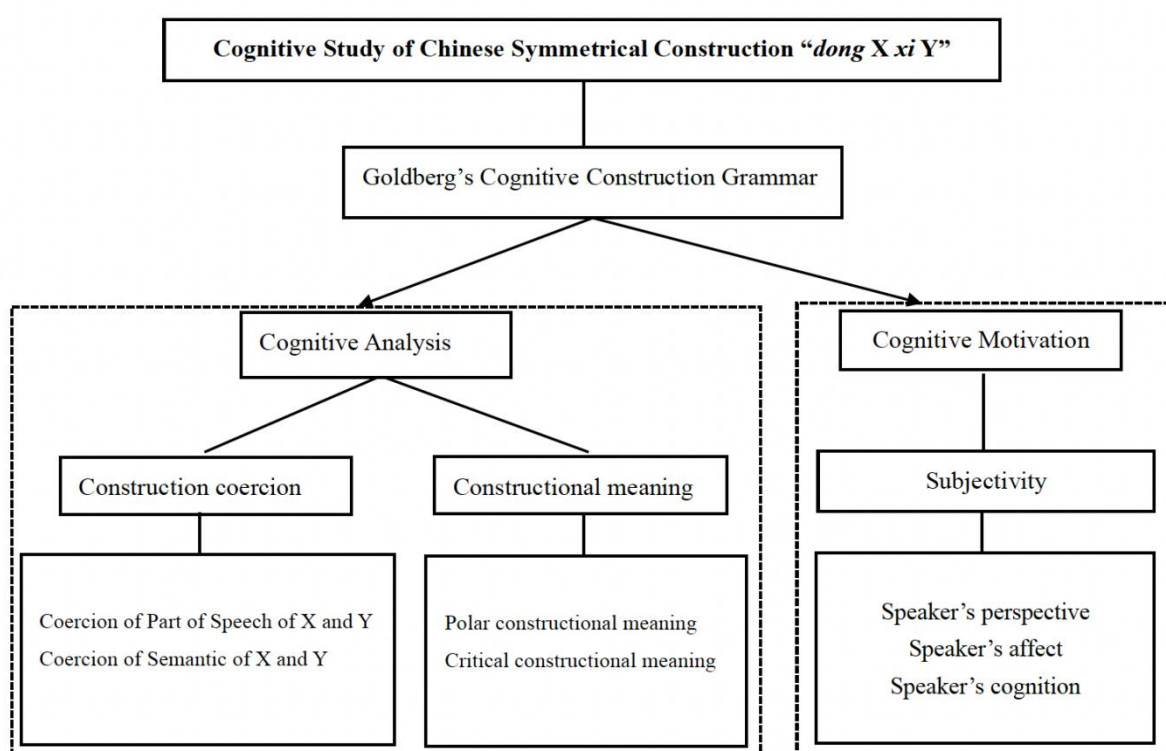


Figure 1: Framework for cognitive study of Chinese symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y"

#### 4. Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were applied in this study. Based on the theory of construction grammar, this study takes the "dong X xi Y" construction as an example to analyze its constructional meanings and its construction coercion phenomena. In addition, the author also attempts to analyze the cognitive motivation of the "dong X xi Y" construction. In the construction grammar theory proposed by Goldberg, the meaning of construction is holistic, and the meaning of a component of a construction can't be analyzed separately. Because of the particularity of construction, it is necessary to analyze its constructional meaning. In addition, in order to make the whole sentence meet the needs of grammar in the whole language environment, there will be construction coercion between constructions. When analyzing construction, this study needs to take both of them into account. And the cognitive motivation of construction has been a difficult problem that has not been solved for many years. This requires us not only to pay attention to the surface form of the construction, but also to start from the internal cognitive motivation.

Therefore, in order to solve the above research problems, the corpus of this study is mainly taken from Idiom Dictionary (Second Edition). This dictionary contains more than 18000 idioms, and gives a comprehensive explanation of the origin, usage and interpretation of each idiom, which is highly authoritative. In addition, in order to explore the construction meaning and the construction coercion phenomenon contained in "dong X xi Y" in different contexts, the corpus of this thesis also comes from Beijing Language and Culture University Chinese corpus (BCC). BCC corpus involves many fields which can comprehensively reflect the language life of today's society and includes both modern Chinese corpus and ancient Chinese corpus. Therefore, the corpus selected in this thesis is authoritative and comprehensive. After manual retrieval, there are 16 fixed idioms that conform to the "dong X xi Y" construction in the Idiom Dictionary (Second Edition). There are 1477 results for the construction "dong X xi Y" in BCC corpus. In this study, the first 200 results were selected for manual screening, of which 71 were in line with the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y".

Therefore, this study takes 16 idioms in the idiom dictionary and 71 corpora in the BCC corpus that meet the requirements of "dong X xi Y" construction form as examples to analyze the constructional meaning of the "dong X xi Y" construction, the construction coercion phenomenon contained in it and the cognitive motivation of the construction.

**Table 1:** Fixed idioms conforming to construction "dong X xi Y" in Idiom Dictionary (Second Edition)

<p><i>dong dao xi wai; dong fu xi dao; dong la xi che; dong lao xi yan; dong lin xi she; dong lin xi zhua;</i> <i>dong ling xi luo; dong nuo xi cou; dong nuo xi jie; dong pin xi cou; dong shi xi su; dong tao xi cuan;</i> <i>dong tao xi zheng; dong tu xi mo; dong wai xi dao; dong zhang xi wang</i></p>
---

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Constructional Meanings of Symmetrical Construction "dong X xi Y"

In the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y", "dong" and "xi" are fixed forms. "X" and "Y" can be filled with any component. They can be single words, phrases or idioms. If "X" and "Y" are divided according to the part of speech, "X" and "Y" can be verbs, such as "dong la xi che" "dong ben xi pao". In addition, "X" and "Y" can also be "yi+noun", such as "dong yi langtou, xi yi bangzi". In the theory of construction grammar, the construction meaning of the construction will not change with the change of the word items. It emphasizes the overall meaning of the construction. In the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y", the change of X and Y will not affect the construction meaning of the whole construction. By searching BCC corpora, the author finds that the construction meaning of "dong X xi Y" can reflect different emotions in different contexts, which can be roughly divided into two categories: polar construction meaning and critical construction meaning.

#### 1) Polar construction meaning

a) I still remember vividly the days when I was carrying national food stamps, eating cold dishes and cold meals, and hiding around (dong duo xi cang) to find a place to live.

"hiding around (dong duo xi cang)" wants to convey to the listener not only to hide in the east and west, but to hide in all directions, reflecting a state of panic.

b) The door slowly closed, and suddenly I saw the man looking around (dong zhang xi wang) outside the door. "looking around (dong zhang xi wang)" indicates that the man is nervous and busy. Therefore, this construction is highly productive here.

c) I had been involved in several campaigns, large and small, and by the early 1980s, I was without a definite place for board or lodging (dong shi xi su).

"without a definite place for board or lodging (dong shi xi su)" is a metaphor for a greedy person who is willing to try to get both benefits. It is a description of being greedy and shameless. But what the speaker wants to express is not really eating in the east and sleeping in the west, but rubbing food and drink everywhere, implying the ironic attitude of the speaker.

d) The crew on the ship woke up from a dream and fled in all directions (dong ben xi cuan) in panic.

"fled in all directions (dong ben xi cuan/东奔西窜)" describes a person who runs away in a panic and has no clue. The "dong X xi Y" construction here is to use "dong" and "xi" to emphasize that the listed events are the most representative in a certain range and reach a certain maximum or peak.

To sum up, according to different contexts, symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" can realize the expression of polar constructional meaning, indicating comprehensive coverage.

## 2) Critical construction meaning

a) He does not have his own opinions on matters and likes to plagiarize from different sources (dong chao xi xi). When he encounters a problem, he often refuses to face it immediately and tries to avoid it.

In this example, the speaker uses this construction to criticize someone who is so malleable. Therefore, "plagiarize from different sources (dong chao xi xi)" wants to convey to the hearer the meaning of criticism that such people will only cause trouble if they do nothing good.

b) I hand you a coke, you give me a tissue and chat aimlessly (dong yi langtou, xi yi bangchui).

"aimlessly (dong yi langtou, xi yi bangchui/东一榔头西一棒槌)" is used to mean that people are busy dealing with local affairs without overall perspective. Here, the speaker uses the "aimlessly (dong yi langtou, xi yi bangchui)" to convey the irrelevant criticism, which is in sharp contrast to the warmth of the following text, and conveys to the hearer that although the conversation is meaningless, life is very pleasant.

c) It's much better than being an official and having to borrow all around (dong nuo xi jie) and worry about firewood and rice.

"borrow all around (dong nuo xi jie/东挪西借)" is a derogatory sense of criticism. The speaker uses this construction to convey to the hearers that his poverty as an official is in sharp contrast to his self-sufficiency.

d) Without a word, the two men came in and looked around (dong qiao xi kan/东瞧西看) the house.

The speaker describes a mother and daughter who walk into other people's homes and look around directly. This is a very impolite behaviour. The speaker uses this construction to express his criticism of the mother and daughter.

In a word, symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" can be used to express dissatisfaction with others and imply criticism. In verbal communication, in order to follow the politeness principle, criticism is usually implied in a relatively euphemistic way rather than being directly elaborated.

## 5.2 Construction Coercion in Symmetrical Construction "dong X xi Y"

In order to eliminate the semantic conflict in the construction, the construction coercion phenomenon occurs. Therefore, coercion refers to the mechanism of reinterpreting the fabric components to eliminate the semantic conflict or repair the wrong match. In the "dong X xi Y" construction, the author believes that the "dong X xi Y" construction will suppress the part of speech and semantics of "X" and "Y".

### 1) Coercion of part of speech of X and Y by "dong X xi Y" construction

a) Although he was ordered to spread from east to west (dong jian xi bei), the vassal was unwilling to do so due to virtue.

In the context of this example, "spread from east to west (dong jian xi bei)" refers to a gradual expansion of the scope. The original idiom of "spread from east to west (dong jian xi bei)" is "dong jian yu hai, xi bei yu sha/东渐于海,西被于流沙". Because the construction follows the principle of economy, the original "jian yu hai/渐于海" and "bei yu sha/被于流沙" are suppressed into verbs from adjectives. In "jian yu hai", it means "slowly". After being suppressed into "jian/渐" in the construction, its verb meaning is "inflow".

### 2) Coercion of semantic of X and Y by "dong X xi Y" construction

a) To be out of school was to be out of work. He was running around (dong pao xi dian) working odd jobs to earn money, and I had nothing to do.

In the context created by this example, "pao" and "dian" mean to run around contrary to their wishes. When talking about "pao" and "dian" in the context of "unemployment after school", it is obvious that the related words can no longer be interpreted literally. Here, context and "dong, xi" together suppress "pao" and "dian", and semantic degradation occurs, indicating that people rush to make a living.

### 5.3 Cognitive Motivation of Symmetrical Construction "dong X xi Y"

The formation and use of construction must be closely related to the promotion of subjectivity, because speakers and writers must inject their own feelings or attitudes into the process of language use. Therefore, this study believes that subjectivity is one of the cognitive motivations of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y", and expounds it from three aspects: speaker's perspective, speaker's affective and speaker's cognition.

#### 1) Speaker's perspective

a) She chattered on and on, full of rambling (dong la xi che) and disorderly gossip, never realising that the names were completely alien to him and meant nothing.

This language material is taken from a literary work. The author depicts the whole story from the perspective of an onlooker. From the author's perspective, this woman is talking about topics that have nothing to do with her. Therefore, for the author, this woman is wasting time. So, the author uses the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" to express his dissatisfaction.

b) As a girl, where do I end up fleeing from place to place (dong tao xi cuan)?

This example is the girl's self-statement. She is sad because she has no home although she can eat enough. Therefore, from her perspective, she uses the symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y" to convey the message that she has no fixed place to the hearer.

#### 2) Speaker's affect

a) He was a partner in a home invasion robbery of more than 80,000 yuan in cash, as well as two mobile phones and a number of ancient coins, before fleeing to the field and moving halfway across China, hiding (dong duo xi cang) for 11 years.

This corpus is a news report. The speaker objectively describes this terrible criminal event to the hearer. From the speaker's perspective, this robbery is completely incorrect. Therefore, the speaker uses the symmetrical construction "hiding (dong duo xi cang)" to imply his own condemnation of this behaviour and his own attitude of taking the blame for everything he has encountered.

b) Although the author laughs that they are mostly "random (dong tu xi mo)" and "haphazard", the deep and profound knowledge and heritage of a generation of old newspaper writers is evident in every line, whether they are describing the landscape, talking about local cuisine, or reminiscing about old people and recalling the old days.

This material describes more than 70 articles that the essayist has been included in. In fact, this is enough to prove that the prose writer has excellent writing style. However, from the perspective of the essayist himself, he thinks that he just writes something casually, which is not worth mentioning. Therefore, when facing praise from others, he uses the "random (dong tu xi mo)" construction to convey modest feelings.

#### 3) Speaker's cognition

a) The four weirdos who are always covering up (dong zhe xi yan) on the surface, had a different attitude, and even a different courtesy, once they learned that the other person was socially prominent.

From the perspective of the speaker's cognition, unscrupulous people are those who do not abide by the law and



discipline or plot to make trouble. Therefore, they also try to cover up the truth. The speaker is very difficult to understand this behaviour and conveys an attitude of total disapproval. Based on the speaker's cognition, this is an act of flattery. Therefore, the "covering up (dong zhe xi yan)" construction is realized by the speaker's cognition.

b) He is a respectable, lazy man with no serious business (dong you xi dang), who likes to roam the hills, is interested in frivolous young sewers and flatters beautiful girls.

The speaker gave his own evaluation based on his understanding of the young man. According to the speaker's cognition, the man is idle and plays around every day, implying that the speaker disapproves of this behaviour.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the theory of construction grammar, this study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to first define "dong X xi Y" as a symmetrical construction. Then, a cognitive analysis of "dong X xi Y" is carried out from the three levels of constructional meaning, construction coercion and construction cognitive motivation. The results of the present study provide evidence that (1) the constructional meaning of "dong X xi Y" includes polar construction meaning and critical construction meaning. (2) In addition, construction coercion in "dong X xi Y" includes part of speech coercion and semantic coercion. (3) Most importantly, these results draw a point whereby subjectivity, metonymy and embodiment can all be regarded as the cognitive motivation of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y". In a word, the cognitive study of symmetrical construction "dong X xi Y", as a frequently used language in daily communication, is of great significance to enrich the theory and practice of symmetrical construction. However, due to the limited number of corpora, the results of this study are relatively one-sided and single. Therefore, future researchers can summarize the constructional meaning of "dong X xi Y" through more corpora, and analyze the construction coercion phenomenon contained in it from more perspectives. Finally, the research on cognitive motivation can also be further explored.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the National Social Science Foundation Project in China (Grant No. 23BYY102).

## REFERENCES

- [1] Antonopoulou E., Nikiforidou K., Construction grammar and conventional discourse: A construction-based approach to discursial incongruity. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 2011, 43(10), pp. 2594-2609.
- [2] Brône G., Zima E., Towards a dialogic construction grammar: ad hoc routines and resonance activation. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 2014, 25(3), pp. 457-495.
- [3] Croft W., *Radical construction grammar: syntactic theory in typological perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- [4] Cui Y. L., The explanation power of coercion for "periphery" of linguistic phenomena. *Foreign. Language and Literature*, 2011, (3), pp. 59-62.
- [5] Goldberg A. E., *Constructions: A construction grammar approach to argument*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- [6] Goldberg A. E., *Constructions at work: The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- [7] Huang M., Iconicity and categorization: A motivational study of the variant construction of Chinese and English idioms. *Journal of Hubei University (Philosophy and Social Science)*, 2020, (3), pp. 144-152.
- [8] Karina T., Goldberg A., Cognitive accessibility predicts word order of couples' names in English and Japanese. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 2020, 31(2), pp. 231-249.
- [9] Kay P., Fillmore C. J., Grammatical constructions and linguistic generalizations: The what's x doing y? construction. *Language*, 1999, 75(1), pp. 1-33.
- [10] Li Y. Z., Metonymy and construction coercion. *Journal of PLA University of Foreign. Languages*, 2004, (2), pp. 10-14.
- [11] Lyons J., *Semantics*. Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- [12] Michaelis L. A., Type shift in construction grammar: An integrated approach to a special coercion. *Cognitive Linguistics*, 2004, (15), pp. 1-67.
- [13] Östman J. O., Fried M., *Construction grammars: Cognitive grounding and structure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

- [14] Pan Y. Y., A study of discourse strategies based on construction grammar: Taking public opinion management of public health emergencies as an example. *Journal of Beijing International Studies University*, 2020, (4), pp. 108-121.
- [15] Peng B. Z., Yao Z. M., Research on the subjectivity of discourse constructions and its metonymy. motivation. *Journal of Heilongjiang Institute of Teacher Development*, 2022, (9), pp. 136-138.
- [16] Shi C. H., The basic ideas of construction grammar. *Journal of Northeast Normal University. (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 2021, (4), pp. 1-15.
- [17] Song W. H., Subjectivity and volition of agents. *Studies of the Chinese Language*, 2005, (6), pp. 508-513+575.
- [18] Wang L., On construction grammar and dynamics of the words and phrases. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 2005, (4), pp. 2-5.
- [19] Wang Y., Cognitive construction grammar. *Foreign Language Research*, 2011, (2), pp. 7.
- [20] Wei Z. J., A grammatical metonymy motivation on Chinese emotional quantitative construction. *Foreign Language Research*, 2020, (6), pp. 23-26+128.
- [21] Wei Z. J., From embodiment to cognition: Cognitive metonymic motivations on Chinese symmetrical construction. *Journal of SJTU (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 2022, (2), pp. 103-112.
- [22] Wen X., *Cognitive foundations of language*. Science Press, 2014.
- [23] Wen X., Si W G., Category shift in translation related to embodied cognition and iconicity. Shanghai. *Journal of Translators*, 2020, (3), pp. 1-6+95.
- [24] Yang L. L., Attribution and (inter-) subjectivity of the construction "Bài(拜)Xsuǒ(所)ci(赐)". *Chinese Linguistics*, 2022, (1), pp. 33-48.
- [25] Yuan Y., Construction coercion, metonymy and GMF. *Foreign Language and Literature Studies*, 2010, (3), pp. 145-152+175+216.
- [26] Yuan Y., Discourse construction grammar and discourse construction coercion. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 2011, (5), pp. 38-45.
- [27] Yuan Y., A study of the new style of the internet from the perspective of discourse construction coercion: Taking "fán(凡)kè(客) Style" as an example. *Contemporary Rhetoric*, 2012, (1), pp. 50-55.
- [28] Zeng G. C., The cognitive approach to discourse studies: From dialogic syntax to dialogic construction grammar. *Foreign Language Research*, 2019, (6), pp. 7-12.