

Pragmatic and Semantic Analysis of the Structure “Relax to (Below / Above / Within / Beyond / Under, etc.) XX”

Xiaoling Gu

The College of Literature and Journalism
Sichuan University
Chengdu, China

Abstract—There are scholars who think that "relax to below XX" is a mixed sentence pattern. However, by reorganizing and investigating the linguistic data in CCL and BCC corpus, and reanalyzing the structure from the perspective of the background of pragmatic discourse and the presupposition of speakers and receivers, it is found that "relax to below XX" and relevant structures conform to pragmatic norms.

Keywords—"relax to below XX"; pragmatics; semantics; context; presupposition

I. INTRODUCTION

Wang Canlong points out that "relax to below XX (放宽到 XX 以下)" is a mixed wrong sentence pattern in his *A mixed wrong sentence pattern: "relax to below xx"*. In terms of semantics, his article considers that "below XX" within the structure is not a clear boundary. Like, in the article, an example is given as follows: "The age of fresh master's and doctoral graduates (full-time) can be relaxed to below the age of 40". In this sentence, according to the expression "be relaxed to below the age of 40", both "38" and "39" are under "40" and thus are eligible. Yet if "below the age of 40" is understood as "38 years old", the meaning of it equals "below the age of 38", which excludes "39". Obviously, this does not express the speaker's intention correctly. In terms of grammar, the article points out that "relax to below XX" is a wrong combination of "relax to XX" and "below XX".¹ This paper will start from the presupposition and discourse background of speakers and listeners, and then discuss the formation mechanism and pragmatic norms of "relax to below XX".

II. CLASSIFICATION OF THE USE OF "RELAX TO BELOW XX"

As a range restriction, "relax to below XX" has the same grammatical function with "relax to above XX", "relax to within XX" and "relax to beyond XX", etc. Therefore, in the process of corpus search, it is necessary to consider them

¹ Wang Canlong. A mixed wrong sentence pattern: "relax to below xx" [J]. Language Planning. 2010.

together and summarize them as "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" structure. Meanwhile, it is found in the process of corpus investigation that the semantic meaning of "relax to XX" structure has the same semantic meaning as that of "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" structure. Here, the two structures are combined into "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" structure and the part in brackets can be omitted. After the analysis of corpus, the specific use of "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" structure is divided into the following categories (Linguistic data comes from CCL corpus and BCC corpus).

A. "Relax ... + from the Reference Point + to the Point Representing Quantity or Tier"

Examples are shown as follows.

(1) Second, the time limit for the first performance of a drama or show *has been relaxed* from one year *to* five years. (People's Daily, April 1993)

(2) The scope of foreign investment was expanded to 475 sectors, and in 1986 it *was relaxed to* 926 sectors, including finance, insurance, domestic trade and other sectors. (People's Daily, July 1993)

(3) They are breaking the rules step by step by *relaxing* the age limit of patients undergoing the operation from 40 *to* 65, and even for many patients who are listed as contraindications for kidney transplantation... (People's Daily, 1st quarter, 1994)

(4) The passing time of 400 m Obstacle, which was supposed to be 1'55", *is relaxed to* 2'15", and the training on Parallel & Single Bars, which should be outdoors, has also been moved indoors... (Internet corpus \ webpage \ C000024)

In the above use cases, specific points representing number like "one year", "475", "40" and "1'55" appear at first, and in terms of the number value, "relax to" is followed by a number like "five year", "926", "65" and "2'15", which is greater than the one appears earlier, in each sentence. If the abscissa indicates an increase in quantity or level from left to right, it should be like in "Fig. 1":

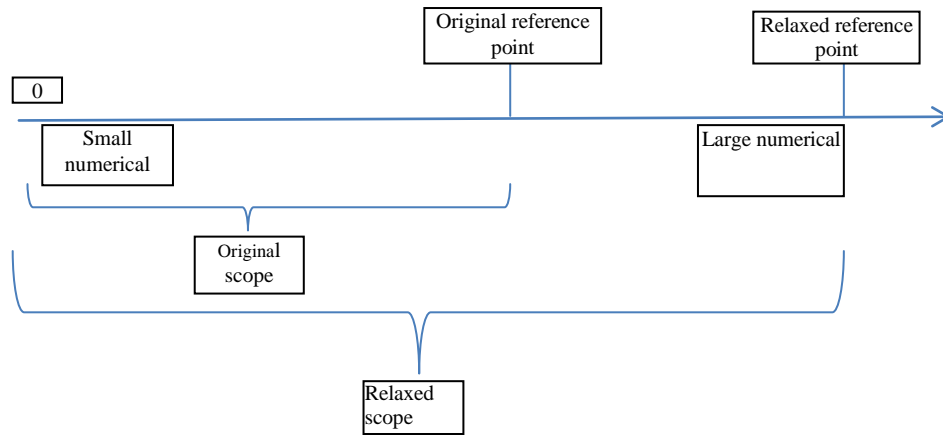


Fig. 1. The horizontal axis indicating an increase in quantity or level from left to right.

Although in the above use cases, a specific number of points are used, instead of the structures of "above XX" or "below XX", to express scope, it is not difficult for readers to infer that what is expressed in the text is actually a specific scope according to the context. For instance, in example (1), "one year" means "less than or equal to one year", which can be expressed as "below one year" if adopting the structure "below / above / within / beyond / under, etc. XX". It is also true in example (2), example (3) and example (4). There is one problem to consider. In example (4), the value is larger after relaxation, but if the original "1'55"" is considered "fast", then "2'15"" must be "not so fast". The relaxation from "slow" to "fast", here is the relaxation from psychological high level to low level in terms of psychological level, as running is considered better when faster. Yet in example (1), example (2) and example (3), the relaxation is from "less" to "more". In terms of psychological level, the relaxation is from "low level" to "high level". Here it can be seen that, on the psychological level, the direction of relaxation is uncertain.

The following are some more examples:

(5) The major is no longer limited to innovation or research fields, and education background is no longer limited to above the master's degree from famous mainland universities, instead. It is relaxed to bachelor's degree from general universities and even non-bachelor personnel can be considered in special circumstances... (Reported by Xinhua News Agency in December 2001)

(6) The trainee must be a senior decision-maker, chairman of the board or general manager of the company, which can be relaxed to deputy general manager for those in large enterprises. (Reported by Xinhua News Agency in August 2003)

According to the contextual and semantic analysis of example (5), if education background is put in a left-to-right horizontal axis in proper order, it should be like in "Fig. 2":

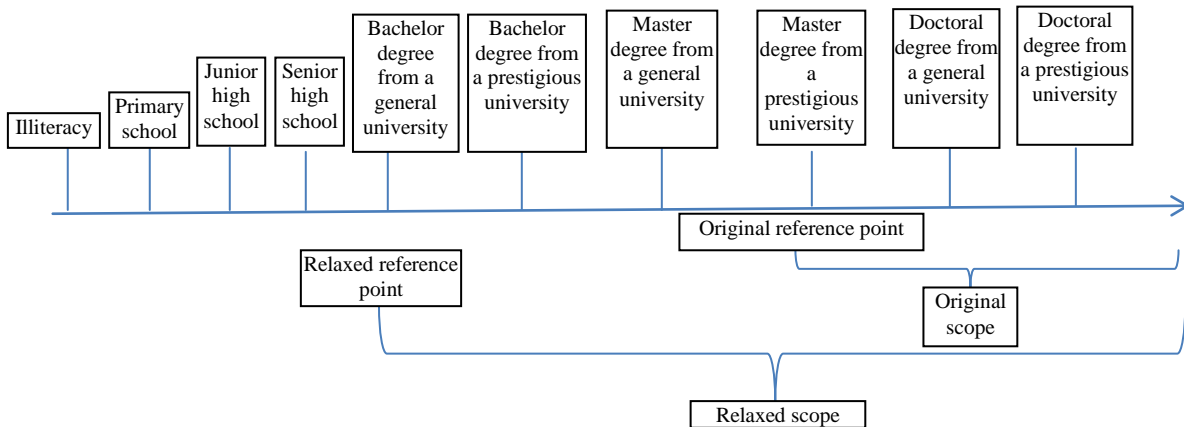


Fig. 2. The requirement of education background put in a left-to-right horizontal axis in proper order according to Example 5.

To complete the semantic supplement of the above examples, example (5) should be "The requirement of master's degree above from a prestigious university... is relaxed to above bachelor's degree from a regular university", and example (6) should be "The requirement of or above from a prestigious university... is relaxed to above bachelor's

degree from a regular university" It is different from (1), (2), (3) and (4), in which although only reference points are given, the semantic meaning of "above XX" can be added according to the context before and after.

As can be seen from the schematic diagram of the two axes above, if the original reference point is used as the base

point, the relaxation can be either towards "right" or "left" of the axes. Then the expression approaches like "above XX" and "below XX" appear in accordance with the semantics. Moreover, the original starting points presupposed when the speaker describes the scope are also different. For example, the starting points of the range of example (1), example (2), example (3) and example (4) happen to be the starting point of the horizontal axis, which can be represented by an exact value of "0", while those of example (5) and example (6) are uncertain, not from the lowest level.

B. "Relax + from Original Range + to Range"

The use cases in part A of this chapter all have a specific reference point, and the reader can automatically complete the structure according to the context and semantics. Yet the following use cases provide a complete structure of the original reference scope and the relaxed scope.

(7) Since December 1, 2003, the city *has relaxed* the per capita living space accreditation criteria of low-rent objects from below 6 square meters *to* below 7 square meters... (Shanghai real estate event 9: Low-rent housing has expanded its benefit scope, Wen Hui Newspaper, 2004)

(8) Shanghai Railway Bureau Ningbo Depot said yesterday, "... The requirement of passenger number for booking a group ticket *is relaxed* from above 30 *to* above 10... (Weibo)

(9) In 1985, the per capita income of farmers was supposed to be below 150 yuan, while the standard for counties in national autonomous areas *was relaxed to* below 200 yuan. (Chinese government white paper on rural poverty alleviation and development in China)

(10) A highway bridge should be above 300 meters in length. For those in general secondary highway that exceed 40 kilometers in rolling terrain on flatlands and that exceeds 20 kilometers in area of mountains and hills..., or are built across a river, this standard can be relaxed to above 200 meters in length. (Selected publications of 1994)

In example (7), example (8), example (9) and example (10), the structure after "relax to" is consistent with the previous structure. "Below 6 square meters", "above 30", "below 150 yuan" and "above 300 meters" represent a scope with the structure of "(below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX", and a structure that also represents scope follows later.

As can be seen from the above use cases, in the preceding text of "relax to", if there is a reference, no matter the reference is a specific point that represents quantity or level or a range, as long as the structure after "relax to" is consistent with the previous text, it will not cause obstacles to readers' understanding, semantically or structurally.

C. "Relax + from the Original Range +to the Point Representing Quantity or Tier"

(11) It is stipulated that the upper and lower limits of the fluctuation range of participating countries' currencies against the central exchange rate shall be maintained within

2.25%, among which the fluctuation range of the currencies against Spain, Portugal and the UK may *be relaxed to* 6%... (People's Daily, February 1993)

(12) The particle size of earth-rock mixture for roadbed filling is not specified in China. After investigation and research by the design institute, the particle size is controlled within 12 cm, and then relaxed to 15 cm. (Selected publications of 1994)

(13) The age limit for female workers recruited by these rapacious enterprises is generally within 30, and very rarely *relaxed to* 35... (Selected publications of 1994)

In these use cases, according to the above context, it can be inferred that after "relax to", "within", is omitted to express the scope.

D. "Relax ...+ to the Point Representing Quantity or Tier"

(14) According to relevant information, compared with the first annual meeting of young scholars in 1992, the age limit for the first author of the paper applying for this annual meeting *is relaxed to* 45 years old, that is, all young scientists and technologists under the age of 45 years old, including overseas Chinese youth working in science and technology... (People's Daily, 4th quarter, 1994)

(15)... Graduates can apply for higher vocational and technical colleges; the upper age limits for applying for college majors *is relaxed to* 25. (People's Daily, 2000)

In the above use case, no reference to quantity or range is found in the preceding context of "relaxed to", and only a specific age is followed by "relaxed to". In example (14), the "below 45" in following text provides explanation for previous text. In example (15), although there is no specific explanation, the expression "upper age limits" indicates that it should mean "below 25". Although the scope of relaxation is not indicated in the above use cases, it is explained and expressed in the context.

(16) In 1994, doctoral students were enrolled nationwide. The national examination was scheduled from 28 to 30 January 1994. The entry age for doctoral candidates *is relaxed to* 45. (People's Daily, August 1993)

(17) In CWDM system, the interval between adjacent wavelength channels *is relaxed to* 20nm, which may enlarge the fault tolerance range of each component... (Internet corpus \ webpage \C000010)

In example (16), "45 years old" is not explained in the context before and after, but the reader can infer from the background knowledge or common sense of the discourse that "people under 45 years old can apply for doctoral degree postgraduate". Example (17) involves professional knowledge, which may not be well understood by the recipient, but one can also come to the conclusion that "the interval between adjacent wavelength channels should be below 20nm" after spending energy on thinking. Therefore, in the structure "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX", whether the structure "below / above / within / beyond / under, etc." is included or not does not seem to affect the reader's understanding of the semantics. If

this is the case, the "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" structure can be replaced to the "relax to XX" structure at will. Based on this conclusion, the following example (19) is changed to (19*).

(19) Germany's new immigration law has amended the employment provisions relating to immigrants, giving priority to domestic workers, but also making it easier for skilled migrants to work in Germany. It also relaxes the age limit for children who emigrate with their parents to under 18. (Reported by Xinhua News Agency in June 2002)

Modification: (19*) Germany's new immigration law has amended the employment provisions relating to immigrants, giving priority to domestic workers... It also relaxes the age limit for children who emigrate with their parents to 18.

On the premise that there is no example (19), the reader can make the following semantic inferences when seeing (19*) for the first time: "the draft also relaxes the age limit for children who immigrate with their parents to be under 18 years old". Children aged 19 and 20 and above are not suitable for immigration because they are less able to integrate into the new environment and have better language learning ability than children under 18 years old"; or "the draft also relaxes the age limit for children who immigrate with their parents to be over 18 years old (the original requirement may be over 20 years old, but it was found that after 18 years old, the child's ability to take care of themselves is strong as an adult, and thus can emigrate with parents). Perhaps the above understandings are a bit far-fetched or inappropriate, but it is understandable that readers who are not familiar with the immigration law make semantic interpretations of "over 18" or "under 18" when they see this news report. Therefore, in such a context, it is very necessary to explain clearly in order to avoid ambiguity.

III. THE CAUSE AND USABLE RANGE OF "RELAX TO (BELOW / ABOVE / WITHIN / BEYOND / UNDER, ETC.) XX"

As the pragmatic trigger for presupposition, "relax to" has two range benchmark in the context before or after. And from the perspective of discourse receivers, the latter range must be larger than the former, that is, from a small range to a large range. In the circumstance of clear discourse, the complete expression of "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" should be:

"relax + ...from range 1... + to range 2..."

That is, "relax + ...from (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX... + to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX..."

First of all, from the perspective of the recipient, the direction of relaxation is uncertain. Some of the relaxation is to the higher direction of the psychological level while some to the lower direction. Expressed in a horizontal axis, it can be relaxed either to the left or to the right. Therefore, words like "above", "below", "within", "beyond" and "under", etc. are needed to define the direction of relaxation in the form of "(below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX". Secondly, "(below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.)

XX" can be omitted, because when the recipient and the speaker have the same background knowledge or common sense of discourse, the omission of it will not cause semantic understanding barriers. According to the above discussion, there should be four types of "relax to" structure that explain the complete context:

(1) "relax+ ...from (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX... + to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX..."

(2) "relax+ ...from (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX... + to XX..."

(3) "relax + ...from XX... + to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX..."

(4) "relax + ...from XX...+ to XX..."

In fact, "below / above / within / beyond / under, etc. XX" is not required to indicate the direction and scope of the relaxation after "relax to" in these four structures, because the explanation of the previous context will make it easy for the reader to make a correct judgment.

In some contexts, speakers simply omit the range being "relaxed" in order to be more "economical" or not to emphasize or care about the range "relaxed", and thus appear the following two structures:

(5) "...relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX..."

(6) "...relax to XX..."

In the context of "range 1", it is not difficult to understand the structure (1). If the speaker omits the scope before "relaxation", it will not cause obstacles for the recipient to understand the following discourse, but reveals less information about "scope 1" discourse compared with the previous (1), (2), (3) and (4). Then, in the case of (6), the recipient of discourse naturally makes a presupposition in his mind about the "pre-relaxation" scope. Presupposition, also known as premise, refers to the common knowledge already known by both parties in a language communication, or the information that can be inferred according to the context after hearing the utterance. It is not shown directly in the discourse, but only contained within it.² When the reasoning and judgment made by the receiver are consistent with the context setting of the speaker, the receiver can understand the speaker's intention and realize communication, otherwise he or she cannot. As can be seen from the above example analysis, when the "scope 1" before "relaxation" is omitted and the "direction of relaxation" is not specified, the recipient must have the same discourse background knowledge as the speaker, so as to achieve smooth communication. In other words, both parties need to share the background knowledge of discourse to determine the "range". According to previous analysis, in most examples, the recipient can make accurate inferences and judgments based on the previous context or the background knowledge, but sometimes the speaker has to make accurate language

² Luo Guoying, Liu Lijing, Lin Chunbo. The pragmatics study and application. Beijing: China Books Publishing House. 2013: 124.

statements to achieve communication. But all the six cases exist in the concrete language of communication.

IV. CONCLUSION

By analyzing the examples, the "relax to below XX" structure cannot be considered as a grammatically wrong mixture. The use of "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" sentence pattern is closely related to the context before and after. Combined with the specific discourse background in pragmatics, it is found that the existence of "relax to XX" and "relax to (below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" echoes the previous context. When the background knowledge of discourse required in the whole context prediction is easy or just common sense that doesn't need to be expressed, the expression "(below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" used to specify the range can be omitted. When it is not easy for the speaker to conjecture the semantics according to the whole context, the structure "(below / above / within / beyond / under, etc.) XX" is needed to specify the direction of the relaxation so as to confirm the range after the relaxation.

REFERENCES

- [1] Luo Guoying, Liu Lijing, Lin Chunbo. The pragmatics study and application [M]. Beijing: China Books PublishingHouse, 2013: 124. (in Chinese)
- [2] Wang Canlong. A mixed wrong sentence pattern: "relax to below xx" [J]. Language Planning. 2010. (in Chinese)
- [3] Zheng Yanan, Huang Qidong. Research on preset cognitive context [J]. Nanjing social science. 2007. (in Chinese)
- [4] Rong Yongxue. Types of sentence pattern mixture and modification [J]. Chinese Language World. 2010(8). (in Chinese)