

Features of "X Dada" in Modern Chinese

Jiaojiao Wang^{1,2,*}

¹ College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan, China

² School of Chinese Language and Literature, China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan, China

*Corresponding author. Email: 475176067@qq.com

ABSTRACT

The word "Dada" has several parts of speech. It's often used as a kinship appellation noun in Chinese dialect. The semantic generalization of "Dada" in the construction of "X Dada" is the common result of the externalization of metaphorical thinking and the generalization of emotional principles. The popularity of "Xi Dada" structure is closely related to such factors as the mechanism of language analogy and the principle of least effort, the unique pragmatic effect of reduplicated words, the herd mentality and innovation psychological of netizen and the huge dissemination effect of network media.

Keywords: X Dada, Semantic generalization, The reasons for popularity.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the word "大大" (Dada) appears frequently on the network. However, it is interesting that these "Dada" is not a common adverb to modify the verb behind, but as a appellation noun used in the surname or table position, occupation and other words behind, forming the "X 大大" construction. Let's start with some real use cases:

A young courier : He was about to go out to work when he saw Xi 大大 coming. (Sina, February 1, 2019)

Monitor 大大, all the class uniform designs you want are here! (Sohu, August 31, 2018)

Teacher 大大: We don't have classes today, OK? (Sohu, September 10, 2018)

Is there a doctor 大大 who can tell me what this means? Is it serious? Can it be cured? (Baidu November 21, 2018)

So, what is the meaning of "大大" in "X 大大" construction? What are the reasons for the popularity of this construction? In order to answer these questions, this paper will analyze the meaning of "大大" in the dictionaries, the semantic generalization process of "大大" and the reasons for the popularity of "X 大大" construction.

2. THE MEANINGS OF "DADA" IN THE DICTIONARIES

Modern Chinese Dictionary (the 7th edition) shows that "大大" has two pronunciations. The first pronunciation is dàdà, which is an adverb list emphasizing a large number or a deep degree; The second, pronounced dà·dà, is a noun with two senses: ①uncle; ②An older man (generally refers to one who is older than his father).¹ *Modern Chinese Dictionary* shows that "大大" has two pronunciations, the first pronunciation is dàdà, which is an adverb emphasizing large quantity and deep degree; the second, pronounced dà·dà, is a noun and is called father or grandfather in the dialect.² The *Modern Chinese Dictionary* points out that "大大", as a noun, is generally used as an appellation in dialects. Therefore, we have consulted two reference books, the *Dictionary of Appellation* and the *Dictionary of Chinese Dialects*.

The *Appellation Dictionary* shows: Dada sounds dà·dà commonly known as the father or

1. Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (7th edition), Commercial Press: Beijing, China, 2017; p.239.

2. Editorial Committee of Modern Chinese Dictionary, *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, Chinese Dictionary Publishing House, Shanghai, China, 2000; p.1021.

grandfather.³ The Dictionary of Chinese Dialects points out that "Dada" has three parts of speech and 16 senses. The first part of speech is a noun, which has 13 senses: great-grandfather, grandfather, grandmother, maternal grandfather, father, mother, father's elder brother, wife of father's elder brother, father's younger brother, father's sister, brother, sister, one's eldest son or daughter and so on. The second part of speech is adjective, including two senses, which means slightly big and very big, and is common in Guangdong dialect and Fujian dialect; The third part of speech is an adverb, meaning very; The meaning of very is reflected in the Fuyang dialect of Anhui.⁴ The above dictionaries show that the word "Dada" is often used as an adverb in Putonghua and as a noun of kinship in dialects.

3. THE SEMANTIC GENERALIZATION OF "大大" IN "X 大大" CONSTRUCTION AND ITS CAUSES

According to the above mentioned, the semantic features of "Dada" in the Appellation Dictionary can be described as: [+ male] [+ elder] [+ direct relatives], while in the Modern Chinese Dictionary (7th edition), the semantic features evolve into [+ male] [+ elder] [+ older than father] [+ respect]. Thus, as a noun, "Dada" has gradually generalized from the initial specific object to the non-specific object, that is, it no longer refers specifically to relatives, but also to non-relatives. It is worth mentioning that after the transformation of netizen, the pronunciation and meaning of the appellation "大大" in Guanzhong dialect have changed, "大大" in addition to the original "father's elder brother", "father's younger brother", "respectable" and other meanings, but also derived the meaning of high status and great responsibility, such as the expression of monitor Dada, teacher Dada and doctor Dada mentioned above. From this, we can see that the semantic feature of "大大" in network language is obviously empty, not only has no restriction of blood relationship, but also has no obvious age and seniority requirements, and even has a broader requirement for gender (not only refers to men, but also refers to women), only retains the semantic feature of [+ respect]. The semantic evolution of "大大" can be summed up as follows: male elder in lineal consanguinity →

honorific title of male elder than father → honorific title. This phenomenon is called "semantic generalization" in linguistics, that is "words continue to produce new ways of use while maintaining fewer and fewer original semantic features, bringing more and more objects into their referential scope [1]."

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the semantic generalization of 大大 is the result of the externalization of metaphorical thinking. Dingfang Shu (2000:20) believes that metaphor is pervasive in our daily life, not only in language, but also in our thoughts and behaviors. The general conceptual system of thought and action upon which we live is fundamentally metaphorical [2]. That is to say, metaphor is a kind of cognitive activity, whose essence is to make use of the similarity between two domains to project part of the features of one conceptual domain to another conceptual domain through mapping, so as to recognize and understand new things. Chinese society has always attached great importance to blood relations, pay attention to the difference between inside and outside, and regard the communication objects with close blood relations as their own family. Therefore, when communicating with non-kinship objects, the speaker often projects the kinship domain of kinship terms into the conceptual domain of non-kinship objects, and constructs a virtual kinship relationship for both sides of communication, thus expanding the meaning of kinship terms and expanding their referential scope.

From the perspective of pragmatics, the semantic generalization of 大大 is also the result of the generalization of affective principle. Shuxin Li (2004) thinks that there are two principles in Chinese appellation: the principle of equal difference and the principle of emotion. The principle of equal difference is determined by the patriarchal clan system and ethical and moral concepts of the Han nationality; the principle of emotion is determined by the Confucian cultural tradition of attaching importance to human relations and harmony [3]. It is a common principle of communication for Chinese people to care for the old in my family and the old in others, and care for the young in my family and the young in others, which extends the limited family relationship to the infinite interpersonal relationship, is a generalization of emotion, with a strong quasi-blood relationship. This generalization of the emotional principle to a certain extent led to the phenomenon of generalization of kinship terms,

3. Shengzhi Han, Dictionary of appellations, New World Press, Beijing, China, 1991; p.136.

4. Baohua Xu, Ichiro Miyata. Dictionary of Chinese Dialects, Zhonghua Book Company, Beijing, China, 1999; p.235.

because Chinese people always hope to have emotional resonance with the addressee in interpersonal communication, in order to narrow the psychological distance between each other, so as to achieve the purpose of establishing a harmonious interpersonal relationship.

4. THE REASONS FOR THE POPULARITY OF "X 大大" CONSTRUCTION

4.1 The Analogy Mechanism of Language and the Principle of Least Effort

Jiaojiao Wang (2013:90) points out that "the analogy mechanism of language refers to the use of analogy to deduce new forms of language expression from existing ones [4]." The earliest prototype word of "X 大大" is "Xi 大大", and other words such as monitor 大大, teacher 大大 and doctor 大大 are all made by using this mechanism to imitate the structure of "X 大大" and replace X with new morphemes or words.

Wangqi Jiang (2005) holds that the principle of least effort is a fundamental principle guiding human behavior, which can be summarized as the maximum benefit at the minimum cost [5]. In interpersonal communication, people will make economic arrangements for the consumption of power in speech activities, which can be saved. In this way, those words and expressions that embody the social and cultural background and have great expressive force have become the object of imitation among netizen. In this way, it is not necessary to adopt new word patterns, but also directly inherit the influence of the original word patterns, thus enhancing the acceptability of words, which is conducive to achieving the goal of maximum communicative effect with minimum effort.

4.2 The Unique Pragmatic Effect of Chinese Reduplicated Words

Reduplicated syllables refer to the words formed by overlapping the same syllables. Zhongning Xu (2012:78) pointed out that "reduplication ... By using the characteristics of Chinese syllables, such as one word, one sound, clear boundaries and continuous superposition of the same syllables into words, the plus code of semantic content is promoted through the plus code of phonetic form, so that complex emotions and tones can be accurately expressed [6]. "大大" is a

kind of reduplicated appellation, whose syllable superposition not only strengthens the rhythm and the beauty of rhythm, but also enriches the expression of music beauty. In addition, from the stylistic point of view, 大大 is a colloquial word, is a typical Chinese dialect. In interpersonal communication, the use of "X 大大", a vulgar word model, can make the language expression more grounded, and make the pragmatic style more cordial and casual. According to a survey by Shuyang Ye (2017), the most popular appellation for leaders among college students is Xi 大大, and 60% of them think it is more cordial, which to some extent eliminates the sense of distance between leaders and the public [7].

4.3 Netizen's Cognitive Psychology of Following the Crowd and Seeking the New

Canlong Wang (2005) pointed out that a new variant form can spread and spread rapidly, and the principle of parroting is at work [8]. In order to be understood and accepted by others, the speaker must not only abide by the language conventions of the society in which he lives, but also pay attention to the new language forms at any time. Once a new form of expression appears, especially when it comes from some authority or powerful speech community, people tend to adjust their language expression in time and keep in line with the new form as far as possible. This kind of intentional or unintentional imitation of other people's language expression forms in order to obtain group identity and prevent marginalization is called "conformity psychology" by social psychologists. Driven by this psychology, once such a novel, unique and expressive language form as "X 大大" appears, it will be quickly respected by netizen who are still seeking novelty and individuality, and gradually accepted and recognized by other members of society and gradually developed into a catchword.

4.4 The Great Communication Effect of Network Media

China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 47th China Internet Development Statistics Report in Beijing on February 3, 2021, which shows that by December 2020, the scale of Chinese netizen has reached 989 million, and the proportion of using mobile phones to surf the Internet is as high as 99.7%. With the characteristics of high efficiency, convenience and strong interaction, the Internet has gradually

changed people's life style in modern society. On the one hand, the convenience of network communication greatly shortens the cycle of information dissemination and provides unprecedented mass information to netizen. Under the influence of Internet technology, the emergence of various self-media (such as micro-blog, micro-message, etc.) has greatly improved people's participation, and the popularization of computer Internet access and the realization of mobile Internet access have intensified the diffusion and penetration of information dissemination. On the other hand, the comprehensive use of a variety of media, to achieve the text, data, images and sounds of the multi-bit integration of communication, pictures and texts, sound and emotion of the mode of communication greatly enhanced the appeal and influence on the audience, to maximize the communication effect. In this context, the "X 大大" construction has become a popular meme under the great communication effect of the network media since its emergence.

5. CONCLUSION

The word "大大" can also be used as an appellation noun in addition to being an adverb. "Xi 大大" is a kind term for President Jinping Xi, which not only expresses the speaker's respect and love for the president, but also shows the president's image of being close to the people, and shortens the distance between the country and the family, so it has been accepted and recognized by President Xi himself and even the whole people.

The semantic generalization of "大大" in the construction of "Xi 大大" can be summarized as follows: male elder in direct relatives → A title of respect for a man older than his father → Honorific title. The semantic generalization of "大大" is the common result of the externalization of metaphorical thinking and the generalization of emotional principles. It not only expands the meaning of "大大" as an appellation noun and expands its referential scope, but also narrows the psychological distance between the two sides of communication to a certain extent, which is conducive to building a harmonious interpersonal relationship. The popularity of "X 大大" construction is closely related to such factors as the mechanism of linguistic analogy and the principle of least effort, the unique pragmatic effect of reduplicated words, the cognitive psychology of netizen to follow the crowd and seek novelty, and the great communication effect of network media.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Jiaojiao Wang.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dawei Liu, Metaphorical Semantic Generalization of Catchwords. Chinese Learning, 1997, vol. 4, pp.33-37.
- [2] Dingfang Shu, Metaphor Studies, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai, China, 2000.
- [3] Shuxin Li, On the Two Principles of Chinese Appellation. Journal of Inner Mongolia University (Social Science Edition), 2004, vol. 5, pp. 77-82.
- [4] Jiaojiao Wang, Causes, Characteristics and Influence of Internet Epidemic, Journal of Yibin University, 2013, vol. 3, pp. 88-91.
- [5] Wangqi Jiang, Zipf and the Principle of Least Effort. Journal of Tongji University, 2005, vol.2, pp.87-95.
- [6] Zhongning Xu, Binary rhetoric. Fudan University Press, Shanghai, China, 2012.
- [7] Shuyang Ye. A Survey on the Appellation of National Leaders among College Students: a Case Study of Department of Chinese as a Foreign Language, Anhui Agricultural University, Theoretical Observation, 2017, vol.3, pp. 167-170.
- [8] Canlong Wang. Two Examples of Lexicalization--On the Relationship between Lexicalization and Grammaticalization. Contemporary Linguistics, 2005 vol.3, pp. 225-236.