


A JUDGMENT STUDY OF LENGTH PATTERNS IN CHINESE:
PROSODY, LAST RESORT, AND OTHER FACTORS


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ABSTRACT

In Chinese VO (verb-object) phrases, 2+1 (disyllabic + monosyllabic) is ill formed when other length patterns are available, such as 2+1 *种植蒜 *zhongzhi suan* vs. the well-formed 2+2 种植大蒜 *zhongzhi dasuan* ‘plant garlic’. However, 2+1 VO is acceptable when alternative length patterns are unavailable, such as 节约水 *jiēyue shuǐ* ‘save water’ and 喜欢钱 *xǐhuan qián* ‘love money’. The conditional acceptance of 2+1 VO is known as the ‘last resort’ effect. However, the predicted judgment difference has not been demonstrated experimentally. In addition, it is unclear whether native speakers find the last resort 2+1 to be as good as 2+2. Moreover, it is unclear what other factors may affect native judgment. To address the questions, we conducted a judgment experiment. Our study shows that (i) 2+2 VO is ranked the best, (ii) 2+1 is ranked the worst when a better form is available, and (iii) the last resort 2+1 is ranked between (i) and (ii). The result (iii) indicates a persistent effect of prosody, even for the last resort

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2+1. In addition, we found a collocation effect between V and O. Moreover, we found considerable variation among the subjects, in that some subjects consistently gave higher scores than others, and for some expressions, there is a high degree of disagreement among subjects, which suggests that personal perspectives may play a role.

KEYWORDS

**Word-length preference Prosody Acceptability experiment
Elastic words Last resort**

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese has many monosyllabic-disyllabic word pairs whose meanings are similar. Some examples are shown in (1), where parentheses indicate a semantically redundant syllable or morpheme.

(1) Synonymous word pairs in Chinese

Monosyllabic	Disyllabic	Character	Gloss
jian	(kan) jian	(看)见	(look) see
ji	ji (shu)	技(术)	skill (technique)
mei	mei (tan)	煤(炭)	coal (charcoal)
suan	(da) suan	(大)蒜	(big) garlic

In ‘look-see’, the meaning of ‘look’ is redundant, since to see something one has to look at it. In ‘skill-technique’, the meaning of ‘technique’ is repetitive. In ‘coal-charcoal’, the meaning of ‘charcoal’ is absent, since ‘coal-charcoal’ only means coal, not coal and charcoal. In ‘big-garlic’, the meaning of ‘big’ is absent, too, since garlic of any size is called ‘big-garlic’.

The above property has been known for a long time (Karlsgren 1918; Guo 1938; Kennedy 1951; Lü 1963; Feng 1996; Duanmu 2007, 2013; Huang and Duanmu 2013; Dong 2015; Duanmu and Dong 2015). While the disyllabic forms look like compounds, they are different from true compounds in important ways. Specifically, we can define synonymous word pairs by two criteria, shown in (2).

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汉语词长搭配在接受度：韵律，唯一选择及其他因素

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提要

汉语动宾短语(VO)的词长搭配中, 2+1(双音节+单音节)的搭配通常不好, 例如 2+1 * “种植蒜”不如 2+2 “种植大蒜”好。但是如果没有其他搭配可选, 2+1 也可以接受, 例如“节约水”、“喜欢钱”等。这种现象叫做“唯一选择”效果。不过, 有的问题仍然有待探讨。比如, 以上所说的两种接受度, 能否通过实验加以证明?“唯一选择”的 2+1 的接受度, 是否跟 2+2 的一样好? 除了词长的搭配以外, 是否还有其他因素影响语句的接受度? 针对这些问题, 我们进行了 VO 的接受度实验。结果显示 (i) 2+2 VO 的接受度最高; (ii) 当有其他它搭配可选时, 2+1 VO 的接受度最低; (iii) 当无其他它搭配可选时, “唯一选择”的 2+1 VO 的接受度在 (i) 与 (ii) 之间。结果 (iii) 表明, 韵律对语句的接受度始终存在影响, 即使“唯一选择”的 2+1 VO 也受其影响。我们还发现, 动词与名词之间的搭配关系也有影响。还有, 参与者之间也存在差异: (i) 有的人打分大大高于平均水平、有的大大低于平均水平, (ii) 有少数结构得分差异很大, 有的人给的是满分、而有的人给的确是最低分, 说明个人观点也可能影响对语句的判断。

关键词

词长选择 韵律 接受度实验 弹性词 唯一选择