

A Grammatical Study of ABAB Reduplicative Speech Act Verbs with Politeness Meaning

-- Taking “Congratulations, Congratulations” and “Come on, Come on” as Examples

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Abstract. Taking “congratulations, congratulations” and “come on, come on” as examples, this paper analyzes their syntactic components, semantic features, pragmatic functions, and special phenomena on the basis of corpus under the guidance of frame semantics theory and interactive subjectivity theory. ABAB reduplicated speech act verbs mostly act as independent predicates in sentences, which is mainly caused by imperative sentences and repeated emotional output of the speaker. This kind of verb has a wide range and colorful semantic characteristics, which is related to the pragmatic functions of forming different emotional colors under a specific cognitive framework.

Keywords: ABAB Reduplication; Speech Act Verb; Construction Grammar Research; Frame Semantics; Interactive Subjectivity.

1. Introduction and Literature Review

ABAB reduplicative verb is a grammatical phenomenon that attracts wide attention in linguistics, and most studies focus on its syntactic components, semantic features, and pragmatic features.

There are many discussions on the grammatical meaning of verb reduplication in the existing research, but it is also highly controversial. However, it is generally recognized that the ABAB verb is a kind of verb reduplication, and it is the reduplication of the basic AB verb. From the perspective of syntax, some scholars regard verb reduplication as momentum structure, and think that it cannot be integrated with tense and aspect category (Zheng, 1988; Xiong, 2016). Other scholars regard verb reduplication as a kind of aspect, and describe verb reduplication as a tense aspect category (Zhao, 1968; Qian, 2000). There are still some scholars believing that verb reduplication belongs to the category of events (Chen, 2005). From the perspective of semantics, previous studies mostly focused on the time and momentum of verb reduplication and its subjective characteristics. Short time and less momentum are the basic meaning of verb reduplication (Zhu, 1982). Verb reduplication is a quantitative measure of verbs related to the speaker, with the tone or modality of the speaker's suggestion and willingness (Sui & Hu, 2016). However, subjective discussions are quite different. Some scholars generalize universality from particularity, from the speaker's emotion, the speaker's perspective and the speaker's cognition (Pan, 2007). From the perspective of pragmatics, reduplicative verb is usually related to social relations, and its usage differs in different cultural backgrounds. Taking verb reduplication as aspect marker to explore its relationship with Amondawa's cultural values is a good example (Araujo Sampaio, Camargos, & Amondawa, 2021).

Austin (1966) put forward speech act theory, arguing that speech itself is a kind of behavior. Searle (1969) re-divided Austin's speech acts into five categories: explanation, instruction, commitment, attitude and announcement. We took the branch politeness meaning of attitude as the research object, and deeply analyzed the unique phenomenon caused by the collision between these verbs and the grammatical phenomenon of reduplication. In the study of the construction grammar of speech act verbs, scholars analyzed the semantic components of some speech act verbs, and discussed the relationship between semantics and syntactic framework (Wierzabicka, 1983). In the ICELAIC 2020 Conference, Zhang (2020) discussed the speech act verbs with the nature of swearing and explored

the diachronic evolution and synchronic distribution by using the methods of diachronic analysis and quantitative statistical analysis.

The previous research mainly focuses on the construction grammar of ABAB reduplicative verbs and speech act verbs respectively, but the new phenomenon caused by the combination of the two categories is still to be discussed. This paper will examine the special alienation in syntactic features, semantic features and pragmatic functions of polite ABAB reduplicative speech act verbs from the perspective of construction grammar.

2. Theoretical Framework

In terms of the special phenomenon in the reduplicative speech act verbs of polite ABAB, the theory of frame semantics and the theory of mutual subjectivity are adopted in this study.

The linguist Charles J. Fillmore believes that meaning is related to scene (Fillmore, 1977: 59), and it is necessary to put it into the corresponding frame to analyze the conditions of special meaning. Frame is closely related to language. In the process of language operation, some words, discourse formulas, the choice of specific grammar, etc. are related to the specific frame in people's memory, and words index some contents in the frame. Words activate relevant frames in people's minds, and then provide background knowledge and scene details for language expression. Based on this, language meaning can be understood. Whether the framework can be successfully activated is pertinent to the context (Wu, 2015). That is, when a group experiences a constant time and forms repeated cognition of the same objective thing, a specific framework will be formed. Under this framework, the explanations of various meanings follow a general principle of "happen to coincide".

E.C. Traugott put forward that intersubjectivity means that the speaker treats the listener as a participant in a discourse event, and pays attention to the listener's attitude and comprehension of the discourse content instead of talking about it (Traugott, 1995). Intersubjectivity is a characteristic of the speaker's organization and expression of language, aiming at meeting the needs of social communication. Mutual shaping and normative association with other normative systems in social life have been routinely reorganized into by-products in pursuit of common comprehension at present (Raymond, 2019).

The theory of frame semantics can help to understand the special linguistic meaning, while the theory of intersubjectivity is closely related to the interpersonal function of speech act verbs, both of which are applicable to explain the causes of special grammatical phenomena. We will discuss these two theories based on literature analysis, data statistics and inductive analysis.

3. Syntactic Function

In terms of syntactic functions, polite ABAB reduplicative speech act verbs are similar to basic verbs AB, and most of them act as predicate components. However, because speech act verbs themselves emphasize the characteristics of speech as the act itself, and speakers in spoken corpus tend to express their opinions concisely, ABAB reduplicative speech act verbs mostly exist independently when they act as predicate components, and do not take the object behind them. For example:

Example [1] Ok, why haven't I met you recently? “,” I am discharged from the hospital ~ ~ ~ ~ “,” < u > Congratulations < /U >!

Example [2] I thought your online application was crazy “,”"Online application is really a fatal thing ... “,” < u > Come on < /U >! “,” Uh-huh

Of course, there are also a few ABAB reduplicative verbs that can be followed by objects, such as:

Example [3] I have been feeling sick recently, and I miss you. < U > Congratulations < /U > to the expectant mother”, [“We still have to continue to live an optimistic life.

In addition, some verbs are used as predicates with interjections such as "ah", "ah" and “ha”, for example:

Example [4] I threw up. I did not throw up, but I suddenly had a fever today, and my blood vomited ... “,” < u > Congratulations < /U > Ah ~ ~ ~ Taking care of your health ~ “], [“This finger is tender and short”, “I like being tender”

Example [5] College English Test Band 4? Isn't it hard? “,” Yes, it is not so good. It depends on luck. “,” < u > Come on, come on < /U > Ha”]

As well as the components that are added with supplementary explanations when they act as predicates, there are no punctuation marks after the verbs at this time to symbolize the completion of this sentence. For example:

Example [6] I am so happy to see my name. I finally waited for you. “,” Just be happy, < u > Come on, come on < /U > Continue to support you”], [“You are so ugly.

And it can also take more than three overlaps as predicate components. For example:

Example [7] I have been in love with someone for almost ten years. I do not want to miss it again ... “,” < u > Come on < /U > Come on! “,” uh huh! Be sure to go anyway!”]

In addition, there are a few ABAB reduplicative verbs that can act as adverbial components. For example,

Example [8] I bought several hard disk with large storage capacity! You finally got the answer< u > Congratulations < /U > Finally getting out of poverty (acting as adverbial)

According to statistics, “Congratulations, congratulations” and “Come on, come on” are mostly used as predicates in sentences, including independently serving as predicates (accounting for the largest proportion). It also includes adding objects after predicates, adding interjections after predicates, followed by supplementary explanations, repeatedly overlapping as predicates, and serving as adverbials and subjects. The details are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sentence Composition and Proportion of “Congratulations, congratulations” and “Come on, come on”

	Congratulations, congratulations		Come on, come on		Total	
Predicate (independent)	30	79%	38	63%	68	69%
Predicate (with object)	1	3%	1	2%	2	2%
Predicate (with interjection)	6	16%	5	8%	11	11%
Predicate (with complement)	0	0	8	13%	8	8%
Predicate (multiple overlapping)	0	0	8	13%	8	8%
Adverbial modifier	1	3%	0	0	1	1%
Total	38		60		98	

Most of the overlapping verbs can be used alone. Can other syntactic components be added? According to the supplement and data analysis of the verbs and arguments that have appeared or are obviously implied in the corpus, Table 2 can be obtained:

Table 2. The supplementary verb argument of “Congratulations, congratulations” and “Come on, come on” and its proportion

	Congratulations, congratulations		Come on, come on		Total	
Be in charge	7	18%	3	5%	10	10%
Live or not?	Yes		Yes			
Subjective argument	Recipient		Recipient			
Without subjective	31	82%	57	95%	88	90%
Total	38		60		98	
With objective	25	66%	one	2%	26	27%
Live or not?	Yes		Yes			
Objective argument	Sensation		Sensation			
No objective argument	13	34%	59	98%	72	73%
Total	38		60		98	

In the table, we can find that, although compared with “come on, come on”, “congratulations, congratulations” can supplement more subjects and guests, but it accounts for a less proportion on the whole, and relatively more subjects can be supplemented.

4. Semantic Features

The semantic features of words cover a wide range of contents, because their conceptual meaning, persistent meaning and commendatory meaning are somewhat different from those of general speech act verbs and ABAB reduplicative verbs. We will also analyze the semantic features from these three aspects.

4.1 Conceptual Meaning

Based on the four features of polite ABAB reduplicative verbs, that is, [+narrator], [+controllable], [+speech], [+behavior] summarized by Wang (2015) and the supplement of subject, object and complement before and after the V1V2 corpus, this study analyzed other semantic features of polite ABAB reduplicative speech act verbs. That is, [+bi-directional], [+relying on], and [+conveying emotion]. [+Bi-directional] means that when such verbs are used, there must be the joint participation of two objects. [+Relying on] refers to the event on which the occurrence of this speech act depends, such as the listener bringing good news. [+conveying emotion] means that the speaker conveys corresponding congratulations, encouragement, etc. to the listener in response to the event, and it needs to be accepted by the listener. As the conceptual meaning is common in the reduplicative verbs of polite meaning ABAB, it belongs to the common characteristics of this kind of verbs, and all the examples in this paper can be represented, so this paper will not provide examples here to avoid repeating.

4.2 Persistent Meaning

In addition, most scholars believe that an important semantic feature of verb reduplication is short time and small amount, which is in line with the semantic features of most action verbs after reduplication, while the specific speech act verbs with polite meaning reduplication are different. And many verbs have the characteristics of repetition, continuation, and diverse time spans. This paper will make a detailed analysis based on corpus and reference figures. For instance:

Example [9] [“I showed love to my ideal man. “,”< u > Congratulations, congratulations < /U>”],[“Junior year? “,” Yes “,” Hello senior, I am a freshman”], [(1)]

Example [10][“What are you busy with recently? “,” Applying for school and preparing for exams ... <U > Come on, come on < /U > I have almost finished during this period, so I can have a little leisure in December ~ No accident after New Year’s Day (2)].

Example [11] It is not ...getting back for the Spring Festival ”], [“Falling in love? < u > Congratulations, congratulations < /U > ha”], [“I like to weigh lighter every day (3)]

Example [12] Li Chen, looking forward to more breakthroughs in movies, and we hope you will bring us more good works. “,” < u > come on < /U>”, [“Hum! What’s wrong with you? Which handsome boy show love to you? “,” This time, big (4)]

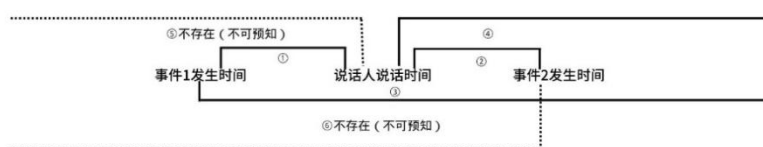


Figure 1. Persistent meaning reference graph

All the data can show that the actions of “congratulations, congratulations” and “come on, come on” do not stop once, but contain a lot of repeated intentions of the speaker. In terms of continuity and time span, according to the table analysis, in Example [9], “I showed love to my ideal man” is event 1, and the verb only acts on this specific event. Because the word “show love” itself has short-term characteristics, the core verb in this sentence has weak continuity, and its span is indicated in Figure 1. In example [10], “After New Year’s Day” is event 2, and the verb acts on the speaker’s speaking time to the time when event 2 takes place, and the duration is fixed. It can be seen from many time words in the corpus, such as “recently”, “during this period”, “December”, “New Year’s Day”. “Come on, come on” starts at “recently” and ends at “after New Year’s Day”, and the span is as shown in Figure 2. In example [11], “falling in love” is event 1, which is easy to know. “Falling in love” has a beginning, but without end, and there is no end in the sentence. Therefore, the verb acts on the time period from event 1 to the end indefinitely, and the span is shown in Figure 3. There is no definite event in Example [12], and the verb acts on the time period from the speaker’s speaking time to the indefinite extension thereafter, with the span shown in Figure 4.

It should be noted that because the spoken dialogue has a certain immediacy. Although it can be indicated whether the future events will happen according to the information conveyed by both sides of the dialogue, it cannot be judged whether the previous events have happened. Therefore, there is no situation that the illustrations 5 and 6 extend indefinitely to the previous time period.

4.3 Commendatory and Derogatory Meanings

Polite speech act verbs are mostly used to express positive feelings such as congratulations, thanks, comfort, encouragement or respect. But when they overlap, there will be more diverse emotional expressions in different contexts and special relatively neutral colors, such as politeness, ridicule, etc. Of course, there are also words with negative colors, such as coping, satire, schadenfreude, etc.

4.3.1 Positive Meaning

Example [13] ... “,” The point is whether he lost money or not? “,” People chose me wisely. . “,” < u > Congratulations, congratulations < /U >. Where do you work?

Example [14] [“I cannot achieve my goal in any way if we work together. “,” < u > Come on, come on < /U > It’s definitely possible! !”]

As the positive meaning is actually the most basic conceptual meaning of polite speech act verbs, it is not difficult to identify and analyze this category. We can easily find the congratulatory meaning in Example [13] and the encouraging meaning in Example [14]. At the same time, as the most basic conceptual meaning, there are various emotions in its positive color, and there are many other emotions besides the five already mentioned. We agree with the overall classification of Jia (2008), that is, the politeness principle can be divided into the generosity principle, praise principle, modesty principle, consistency principle, and sympathy principle. That is, emotions in a positive sense can be divided into generosity, praise, modesty, consent and sympathy, although not all of the terms used in this paper are included.

4.3.2 Neutral Meaning

Example [15] Well, my boyfriend took it for me, from the boyfriend’s perspective. “,” < u > Congratulations, congratulations < /U >, there’s another male ticket]

Example [16] How can I be at this level ... I’m far behind you < u > Come on, come on < /U>”]

Although the same word is used in the syntactic structure of the same place, the emotional color of the word meaning has also changed due to the change of context. In example [15], “Congratulations, congratulations” is more inclined to express teasing about the changes of the listener’s love life while congratulating the listener on “having a boyfriend”, as evidenced by the adverb “again” and the listener’s unsatisfied reply. In Example [16], “come on, come on” in the context above, “How can I be at this level ...” and “I’m far behind you”, is more inclined to a kind of speech technique in which both speakers are humble and polite to each other.

4.3.3 Negative Meaning

Example [17] [“ I overslept and was caught in a heavy fog traffic jam ... “,” < u > Congratulations < /U>”], [“Happy birthday, I know your regret is that I am not around”],

Example [18] Two years of the midnight snacks, tomorrow we will all be smooth! “,” I’m still on my way“,” < U > Come on < /U > . . Go to sleep, I have had enough lunch

Similar to 3.3.2, the emotional color here has changed more thoroughly. In Example [17], in view of such contexts as “oversleeping” and “traffic jam in heavy fog” which express bad experiences, the speaker’s “congratulations, congratulations” completely changed into the gloating of the listener and lost its original conceptual meaning. In example [18], the message “I’m still on my way” is just an objective statement with no emotional color. It doesn’t need to use any polite verbs such as “come on, come on”, so the appearance here will inevitably appear abrupt. In addition, the symbol of “two full stops” behind it (speechless in the network context) can be analyzed, which shows that the speaker here has imposed negative meanings, but only responds to the listener’s words.

5. Pragmatic Analysis and Phenomenon Explanation

With the analysis above, we find some prominent linguistic phenomena, that is, first, most of them act as predicates independently; second, it has a varying time span; last, it has semantic features of wide application range and diverse emotional colors.

We put the first and the second under the theory of inter-subjectivity, put the last into the theory of frame semantics, and combine pragmatic analysis to explain and discuss these three phenomena.

5.1 Discussion from the Perspective of Interactive Subjectivity

From the perspective of the speaker, “congratulations, congratulations” and “come on, come on” are not used to express the speaker’s demands or wishes for the listener. From the listener’s perspective, the listener is not given the initiative to act, but a one-way emotional expression of the speaker to the listener. Therefore, the analysis is carried out from the perspective of the participants in the event. First of all, from the subjective one-way perspective, the speaker pays attention to the listener’s understanding of the discourse content, and regards the listener as a participant in “congratulations, congratulations” and “come on, come on”, not the content, which is a series of happy events. While the speaker expresses congratulations or encouragement to the listener, the listener receives the emotion first but doesn’t need to make a choice. Although this kind of conversation is often accompanied by the listener’s “thanks”, which is only a specific reaction in the cognitive framework, not a choice. That is, the two verbs and their subsequent objects mean that the listener, lacks sufficient adhesion and connection, so they do not often add ingredients after the verbs. In addition, judging from the choice of language materials, because our language materials are spoken rather than written, speakers are used to omit the subject “I” in oral expressions with “I” as the subject, so they do not often add components before verbs. At the same time, based on the perspective of the influence of the involved objects, the speaker’s speaking time is a deterministic factor, while the occurrence time and duration of event 1 and event 2 in the continuous meaning reference diagram change with the situational context. Therefore, different time spans appear, which in turn contribute to the establishment of different situations and interpersonal functions with different purposes.

5.2 Discussion from the Perspective of Frame Semantics Theory

The seventh edition of the modern Chinese dictionary defines “congratulations”, as “a formula to congratulate others or groups on their happy events”, which can be used as the two functions. First, entertainment words are used to express greetings or congratulations. Second, it refers to something to be congratulated. It is a specific term that has existed since ancient Chinese society as a guest to express the feeling of celebrating a host’s happy event. “Come on” is defined as “adding fuel oil or lubricating oil” and “improving efforts”. From the perspective of diachronic and synchronic linguistics, these two words have different application scopes in different periods. At the same time,

by comparing the analysis of three commendatory and derogatory meanings and dictionary definitions in the previous article, the negative meaning is a special phenomenon. At the same time, it expands the application scope of verbs. The reason for this phenomenon comes from our cognitive framework, that is, cultural context. Therefore, we will explain it from the perspective of frame semantics.

As far as “congratulations, congratulations” is concerned, since ancient China, guests have the intention to say “congratulations” or “congratulations, congratulations” to their hosts for their “happy events”. In ancient times, agricultural production only depended on the climate, the traffic is inconvenient, and marriage is compared with the imperial examination, ten years of hard work is only for becoming an official, so when such “four happy events of Chinese people” appear, such as “a rainy day after a long drought, a friends’ reunion in foreign lands, a wedding night, and a top candidate in the imperial examination”, people will all congratulate the parties concerned. Then with the development of various means of transportation. Although marriage is still a big deal, its importance is lower. Career choices are becoming more and more diverse, and these happy events in the past are not hard to come by now, so our happiness is extended to all happy events. As far as “come on, come on” is concerned, the origin of the word “come on” still needs to be verified. One statement is an inspirational motto obtained after entering Zhuge Liang’s tomb with Liu Bowen, the prime minister of the Ming Dynasty, and the other is an oil-bumping horn used by workers in oil-pressing workshops. Some people speculate on the origin of the word by the fact that vehicles will be motivated if refueled, but the popularity of vehicles in China is relatively late, and there is no saying abroad that “come on” refers to encouragement. From a diachronic point of view, this speculation is wrong. But it is certain that the original meaning of this word is to add fuel, lubrication, edible oil, etc., and then it is gradually and widely used in modern society, such as games, examinations, task completion, and other occasions, and it is widely used and extended to further efforts and encouragement.

Similarly, negative meanings are produced in a persistent and constant framework, and a specific group follows a universal principle, thus developing repeatedly. “Congratulations, congratulations” and “thanks and thanks” did not have negative meanings at first. Negative meanings evolved from their conceptual meanings and special contexts and were used to express satire, schadenfreude, and other emotions when compliments and derogatory words were needed.

6. Conclusion

Taking “congratulations, congratulations” and “come on, come on” as examples, guided by the theory of frame semantics and the theory of inter-subjectivity, this paper mainly examines the syntactic function, semantic features, and pragmatic functions of the politeness ABAB overlapping speech act verbs from the perspective of construction grammar, and analyzes the alienation phenomenon. Finally, it comes to the conclusions:

Firstly, ABAB reduplicative speech act verbs mostly act as predicate components independently in sentences, and they have varying time spans. These two kinds of phenomena are mainly caused by repeated emotional output with the speaker. Secondly, ABAB reduplicative speech act verbs have semantic features of a wide range and multi-colors, which are related to the pragmatic functions of forming different emotional colors in a specific cognitive framework.

The findings of this paper can be used for reference in the cross study of ABAB reduplicative verbs and speech act verbs, and the special phenomena in them can be used as a reference for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. However, limited by the length, the research on construction grammar, which covers a wide range of contents, is narrow. In the future, more detailed supplements will be added as far as possible.

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