

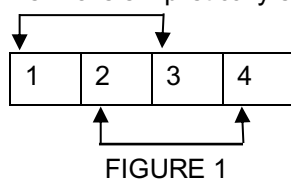
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## A Study of Alternate Detachable Construction in Chinese Idioms

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Based on *Electronic edition of V4.00 Version of Chinese Dictionary* as the closed corpus, using data and data-driven methods, this research first finds the abundant existence of Alternate Detachable Constructs in Chinese idioms, amounting to almost one fourth in all, and verifies that alternate detachment mechanism is entrenched in the thinking mode of Chinese people which is responsible for the flourishing of alternate detachable constructs in Chinese four-character idioms. What the alternate detachment mechanism is like is simplistically sketched in FIGURE 1,



in which numbers 1-4 are employed to stand for the four linear structural slots in Chinese four-character idioms and the two symmetrical solid arrows indicate the alternate imbedding ways (1-3 & 2-4 alternate slots) for the detached elements from the original two-character words.

Accordingly, the alternate detachable construction is formed by detaching elements from at least one two-character word and then embedding into the alternate slots of detachable constructions. The imbedded elements then recombine to form new structures with the former 1-2 slots and the latter 3-4 slots being structurally and semantically symmetrical. Take “南征北战(Nan Zheng Bei Zhan)” (fight up and down in the country) for example, in which the original phrases“南北(NanBei)”(North and south) and “征战(Zhengzhan)”(fight and crusage) are detached and embedded into the 1-3 & 2-4 alternate slots to form a new four-character idiom which means more than the simple combination of “征战”and “南北” as “征战南北”.It is worth mentioning that the infrequency of other types of detachment modes such as 1-4 & 2-3 slots of detachment can be roughly ascribed to the inclining rhythmic characterization in Chinese and its dependence on symmetrical structures in forming new words and clauses. Statistically, there are 5 types of internal grammatical structures (i.e.verb-object coordinative ADC, endocentric coordinative ADC, subject-predicate coordinative ADC, verb-complement coordinative ADC 5. the repeating coordinative ADC) and 15 detachment modes (i.e. 1.CADB 2.CACB 3.CBDA 4.CBCA 5.ACBD 6.ACBC 8.A1A2B1B2 9.A1B2B1A2 10.B1A2A1B2 11.B1B2A1A2 12.AABB 13.ACDB 14.BCDA 15.A1A2B2B1).

According to the views of Cognitive Linguistics, the intrinsic meaning of a linguistic unit is closely related to the meanings of its constituent parts and the way in which these parts are arranged. This study, within the frame of Constructive Grammar, by means of analyzing the mechanism of detaching and recombining of the internal structures in Alternate Detachable Construction in light of multiple coercion-inheritance model (MCI model), and further elucidating their characteristics of syntax and semantics, finds that detachment and recombination are one of the basic means of constructing idioms in Chinese. What's more, the research empirically proves the notion that conventional meanings of idioms ascribe greatly to the meanings of their constituent parts and the way in which these parts are arranged. Specifically speaking, it is by way of reconstructing the constituent parts under the mechanism of alternate detachment that the conventional constructional meaning is formed.