

A Cognitive Study of Nominal Predicate Constructions in Mandarin

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The nominal predicate construction(NPC), which has long been recognized as one of the sentence patterns in Mandarin, is characterized by two adjoining nominal phrases, N1 and N2, with one as the subject and the other the predicate, like in the following example: *mingtian*(tomorrow) *xingqitian*(Sunday)(It's Sunday tomorrow). As this example indicates, *mingtian*(N1) is a nominal phrase designating a thing and *xingqitian*(N2) is another nominal phrase designating another thing related to N1 where N2 is presumed to have some tinge of adjectives or even verbs. Definitely there exists a relation of predication between the two nominal phrases. However, this is not evidential enough to show that the combination in question is a sentence. It differs from an appositive construction where N1 and N2 work together as an independent component of a sentence, such as in *mingtian xingqitian de shihou women zai qu ba*(Let's go tomorrow Sunday), where the appositive construction *mingtian xingqitian* functions as an adverb of time; It isn't an elliptical sentence for *mingtian shi xingqitian*, in which the linking verb *shi* is supposed to be omitted owing to some contextual factors. Based on Langacker's cognitive grammar, this paper discovers that N2 cannot be rendered as an adjective or verb (which will blend the borderlines between different word classes) but belongs to the same schema with N1. In this schematicity, N1 occupies the core and N2 denotes one of its peripheral elements such that N2 functions as one of the possible properties of N1. The formation of this construction is initiated by the fact that N1 and N2 are activated or profiled(in the Langackerian term) simultaneously in a particular scenario such as in a short brief statement of a fact. For example, one can introduce himself to another in an interview by using a nominal predicate construction like *wo, jiaoshou*¹. The comparison with the appositive construction and the *N1 shi N2* construction reveals that the nominal predicate construction is not a sentence in the traditional sense and it, together with the single utterance construction, appositive construction, *shi*-construction, *you*-construction, existentials and other force dynamic constructions, constitutes a continuum of the Mandarin syntax. The reason that N2 can bear aspectual or tense forms, e.g. *wo*(I) *ye*(also) *jiaoshou*(professor) *guo*(tense:past)(I was also a professor), is that the thing represented by nominal phrases can also exert changes in a longer time span, just as the process instigated by verbs.

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¹ There is always a pause between N1 and N2 in NPC in spoken Mandarin. Pragmatically, this gives an emphasis mood to make sure about the present fact. Cognitively, this shows that N2 is a secondary feature among all the features of the schema of N1.