The Emergence and Rationale of the Reminder - Emphasis Construction "N是用来V的" in Chinese

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Abstract

This paper primarily investigates the emergence process of the reminder-emphasis construction "N是用来V的" (N is used to V). The formal emergence process unfolds as follows: from the objective event narration "用NV" (use N to V), to the subjective evaluation of things "N可以用来V" (N can be used to V), and finally to the inter-subjective assessment "N是用来V的" (N is used to V). The emergence of meaning primarily relies on pragmatic inference: the speaker violates the cooperative principle, the listener actively engages in inference, and the implicature is captured. During the emergence process, the construction requires that N possesses the property of "everyday activity" and V exhibits "conventional functionality", while "是用来……的" (is used to…) emphasizes "functional prominence".

Key words: N是用来V的, Reminder-Emphasis, Construction Emergence, Rationale of Construction

Introduction

In Modern Chinese, expressions such as "房子是用来住的" (Houses are for living in) and "月饼是用来吃的" (Moon-cakes are for eating) frequently appear in everyday discourse. For example:

（1）第四，促进房地产市场平稳健康发展。要坚持"<u>房子是用来住的</u>、不是用来炒的"的定位，综合运用金融、土地、财税、投资、立法等手段，加快研究建立符合国情、适应市场规律的基础性制度和长效机制。（《人民日报》2016年12月17日）

（2）其实，无论月饼生产商把包装做得如何精美，但若只做"面子"，不做"里子"的工作，恐怕最终还是要丧失市场，丢掉顾客的。毕竟，<u>月饼是用来吃的</u>。（《人民日报海外版》2004年08月23日）

（3）于是，有些添加药物的保健食品、营养食品也应运而生。<u>药品是用来治病的</u>，有严格的剂量界限，随便吃药是会影响健康的。（《人民日报》1984年07月14日）

The underlined portions in the aforementioned examples can be formalized as "N是用来V的" (N is used to V), which primarily serve to remind and emphasize the functional purpose V of N. Therefore, this construction can be referred to as the reminder-emphasis construction "N是用来V的". However, the issue lies in the fact that these V functions represent the most basic purposes of N. Whenever N is mentioned, people naturally associate it with its functional purpose V in their minds. In other words, these V functions are universally recognized as inherent to N. For instance, when mentioning "房子", one naturally thinks of its purpose for living; when referring to "月饼", its purpose for eating comes to mind.

Given this, why is there still a need for such reminder and emphasis? A review of existing literature reveals that no studies have yet provided an explanation for this phenomenon.

We contend that the key to addressing this question lies in elucidating the origins of the construction's form and meaning, as the relevant manifestations of form and meaning are inherently tied to their formation process. The question then arises: how should this be explained? The approach adopted in this paper is to treat the reminder-emphasis construction "N是用来V的" as a distinct construction and to interpret it from the perspective of constructional emergence. This involves analyzing the emergence process, including the development of both the construction's form and its meaning. The following presents a preliminary analysis.

Construction Emergence

The emergence of constructions is a significant topic in construction grammar research. Goldberg (1995, p. 4), in her classic definition of constructions, pointed out that a construction cannot be fully predicted from its components or other preexisting constructions. Shi (2013, pp. 23-38) further argues that a fundamental premise for understanding the characteristics of constructions is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that the (syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic) features of a construction cannot, or cannot entirely, be derived from its constituent elements. In other words, at least some aspects of a construction's features "emerge" from the linear sequence of the construction, making them non-

linear. This is the emergent nature of constructional features, also referred to as the constructionality of a construction.

Certainly, academic discussions on the emergence of constructions are not limited to the emergence of constructional meaning (including constructional features). Scholars have also approached the topic from a diachronic perspective, arguing that the formation of constructions involves a developmental process. For instance, Traugott (2008) posits that constructions emerge gradually rather than being inherently fixed. Constructions undergo a process of expansion and manifestation, progressing from the lowest level of constructs to micro-constructions, meso-constructions, and ultimately to macro-constructions at the highest level.

However, dynamic emergence can be either diachronic or synchronic. With respect to the reminder-emphasis construction "N是用来V的" (N is used to V) discussed in this paper, we do not intend to explore its formation process from a diachronic perspective. Chinese is a pragmatically oriented language, where pragmatic factors play a primary role in shaping sentence structures (Liu, 1995). Therefore, we propose to examine the specific influence of pragmatic factors on the emergence of constructions from a synchronic standpoint.

1. Formal Emergence

Based on corpus evidence, we observe that the formal emergence of the construction "N是用来V的" (N is used to V) has undergone approximately the following stages: objective event narration "用N V" (use N to V, indicating the agent's action on N) ⟶ subjective evaluation of things "N可以V" (N can V) ⟶ inter-subjective assessment "N是用来V的" (N is used to V). [Here, the three stages are representative constructions identified

based on the progression from "objective narration" to "subjective evaluation" and then to "intersubjective assessment". These stages are not exclusive, as there may be other similar expressions at the "objective narration" stage, for example] (1).

1.1 "用 N V"

The construction "用 N V" (use N to V) emphasizes the agent's utilization of a tool to achieve a certain purpose, that is, the agent accomplishes a goal by acting upon N, highlighting the agent's instrumental role. For example:

(4) 有好几次，他上前向他们道辛苦，他们扭转脖项，给他看后脑瓢。于是赵四去到城外，捡了一堆砖块，在城墙上用白灰画了个圆圈，练习腕力和瞄准，预备打他们的脑瓢。（老舍《老张的哲学》）

(5) 只见东洋武士佐藤秀郎和神鞭傻二面对面站着。东洋武士浑身全黑，短身长臂，鼠面鹰目，那样子非妖即怪。傻二还是宽宽松松一件蓝布大褂，辫子好像特意用蓖麻油梳过，上松下紧，辫梢夹进红丝线头绳，漂漂亮亮盘在顶上。（冯骥才《神鞭》）

(6) 随着吱嘎吱嘎开张的门扇，她的爹借着月光，她看到爹的脸上血迹斑斑。那部不久前在斗须大会上虽败犹荣的胡须，只余下几根根，鬈曲在满下巴的血污之中。她惊问："爹，这是怎么啦？"她唤醒小甲，把爹弄到炕上。用筷子撬开紧咬的牙关，灌进去半碗凉水，他才苏醒过来。（莫言《檀香刑》）

(7) 一九九四年十月的一个黄昏，当他步行回家刚刚走过一座桥，一个歹徒扑上前去用刀刺向他的颈脖。他被路人送到医院，脱离了危险，但由于伤及神经，右手至今不能恢复写作。（余秋雨《千年一叹》）

It is evident that the "用 N V" (use N to V) typically requires an agent, as seen in the examples: "她" using chopsticks to pry in (4) and (5), Zhao Si using white lime to draw in (6), and "他" using his hands to push in (7). The agent employs "用 N V" to achieve a specific purpose, such as pouring cold water to sober "him" up or smashing walnuts to eat. In these cases, N is usually definite, meaning that both the speaker and the listener can identify the referent of N with a specific entity in the context, such as "chopsticks, stone, white lime, hands" in the aforementioned examples. Further examples include:

(8) 那人摔倒在地，痛苦地咕哝着。德克尔把左轮手枪踢到一边，用**贝瑞塔**顶着他的脑门，迅速把他身上搜了一遍。（戴维·莫雷尔《较量》）

(9) 藏书中还有李玄伯先生的《中国古代社会新研》，是我初一时买的，我万万没想到在七年以后，我竟在李先生的课堂上，用**这书**做了教本！（李敖《传统下的独白》）

In example (8), "贝瑞塔" refers to a type of handgun and is a proper noun. In example (9), "这书" takes the form of "这 + (quantifier) + noun", which, according to Chen (1987, pp. 81-89), represents a typical definite noun phrase. Meanwhile, in the "用N V" (use N to V) construction, V can be a procedural component, denoting specific events with strong actionality, and can be modified by aspect markers such as "了/着/过". Thus, it functions as an event sentence (Yuan , 2003, pp. 3-16), as seen in examples (4-5) and (8-9) with "画了"，"梳过"，"顶着"，and "做了". Additionally, V can co-occur with directional verbs, as in examples (6-7) with "撬开" and "刺向".

1.2 "N 可以 V"

Sentences with definite components as objects typically exhibit strong anaphoric continuity (Zhang & Fang, 1996, p. 10). If the preceding discourse context has already discussed N, and the speaker wishes to emphasize the functional purpose of the subject, the continuity of the topic motivates the use of N as the topic. From their subjective perspective, the speaker evaluates N through the construction "可以V" (can V), forming the construction "N可以V". Consequently, compared to "用N V" (use N to V), the agent argument in "N可以V" can often be omitted. For example:

（10）夫人顾咸信，见老何成天心事重重，走在大街上也是勾着脑袋，怕他出事，更怕他会跑到什么会上，或是去什么场合，像过去一样想到什么说什么，就动员老何去学学<u>抽烟喝酒</u>。因为，她听人说，<u>酒可以消愁</u>，烟能助人深虑，她只希望老何平安地度过这段日子。（《中国农民调查》）

（11）天一阁是明朝鄞县范钦藏书的地方，建造于嘉靖四十年（1561）。当时藏书七万多卷。范钦认为书最怕火，古书上有<u>"天一生水"</u>的说法，<u>水可以灭火</u>，便把藏书楼取名为天一阁。（《中国儿童百科全书》）

（12）<u>土豆含有维生素C，生活在现代社会的上班族，最容易受到抑郁、灰心丧气、不安等负面情绪的困扰，土豆可以帮你解决这个难题。食物可以影响人的情绪</u>，是因为它里面含有的矿物质和营养元素能作用于人体，改善精神状态。（《人民日报海外版》2015年02月06日）

In examples (10-12), the agent is not explicitly mentioned, as the speaker primarily aims to emphasize the functional purpose of N. Consequently, N is topicalized and explained using the "可以V" (can V)

construction. Unlike in the "用N V" (use N to V) structure, N in "可以V" does not refer to a specific entity but typically functions as a generic reference (a hallmark of topicalization), highlighting the shared functionality of a category of things. For instance, almost all types of alcohol can alleviate sorrow, hence the expression "借酒消愁".

Moreover, these instances of N are discourse-organized in continuation of a specific topic within the text. For example, in (10), "抽烟喝酒" constitutes new information introduced in the preceding sentence. In (11), "天一生水" serves as a crucial piece of evidence in the speaker's argument. In (12), "食物" is a theme that runs through the prior context (e.g., potatoes).

Furthermore, the V in "N可以V" (N can V) functions as an attributive predicate, exhibiting clear non-processual characteristics. It abstractly denotes an action, state, or relationship (Guo, 1997, pp. 162-175). As a result, it cannot be modified by aspect markers such as "了/着/过", as seen in the ungrammatical examples "*酒可以消了愁", "*水可以灭着火", and "*食物可以影响过人的情绪".Similarly, it cannot co-occur with directional verbs, as in the case of "刀可以切菜", which cannot be extended to "刀可以切向菜".

In addition to the syntactic constraints on N and V, there are further differences between "N可以V" (N can V) and "用N V" (use N to V). According to Yin and Yuan (2022, pp. 13-26), in "N可以V", "N must possess a functional role" and "V must represent the conventional functional role of the core noun N", whereas this is not necessarily the case for "用N V". For example:

（13）他用真挚的心爱学生。　　他用酒消愁。　　他用酒洗澡。

　　　　*真挚的心可以爱学生。　　酒可以消愁。　　*酒可以洗澡。

（14）他用泪水告别爱人。　　　他用水灭火。　　他用水（以指代笔）画画。

　　　　*泪水可以告别爱人。　　　水可以灭火。　　*水可以画画。

In examples (13) and (14), the expressions "真挚的心" and "泪水" generally do not readily evoke corresponding functional roles, thus rendering the construction "N可以V" (N can V) infelicitous. Similarly, "洗澡" and "画画" are not typically conventional functional roles associated with "酒" or "水", respectively, which also results in the invalidity of the "N可以V" (N can V) construction. The construction "N可以V" (N can V) is only well-formed when N possesses a functional role and V represents its conventional functional role. The notion of a "常规功用角色" indicates that this is not a subjective evaluation by the speaker but rather a socially shared understanding of N. Examples include "酒可以消愁" and "水可以灭火".

Furthermore, in their comparison of the substitution constraints between the constructions "N可以V" (N can V) and "用N V" (use N to V), Yin and Yuan (2022, pp. 13-26) point out that [when V represents the surface functional role of the subject noun, the construction "N可以V" (N can V) cannot be replaced by the "用N V" (use N to V). In the construction "N可以V" (N can V), V can indeed be the surface functional role of the subject noun [The surface functional role contrasts with the potential functional role. For example, in the sentence "白菜可以吃，也可以止痰化咳","吃" represents a surface, direct function and is thus a surface

functional role, whereas "止痰化咳" represents a deeper, potential function and is therefore a potential functional role. For further details, see Yin and Yuan (2022, pp. 13-26).]. However, based on our corpus analysis, we find that in the construction "N可以V" (N can V), V is generally not the surface functional role of N, as seen in questionable examples like "？酒可以喝" or "？饭可以吃". Such examples only appear when emphasizing or describing a specific, concrete entity. For example:

（15） 他说："他们吃什么？他们有没有好吃的鱼？"他的舌头从黄色的利齿间钻了出来，舔舐着苍白的嘴唇。"不，我们没有鱼，"佛罗多说："我们只有这个——"他拿起一片精灵的干粮说："还有水，希望这边的水可以喝。"（托尔金《魔戒全集》）

（16） 鲎（hòu），节肢动物，头胸部的甲壳略呈马碲形，腹部的甲壳呈六角形，尾部呈剑状，生活在海底。肉可以吃。俗称鲎鱼。（《倒序现汉词典》）

In example (15), "这边的水" refers to water in a specific context, which is unfamiliar to people. In example (16), "肉" anaphorically refers to the meat of the horseshoe crab, serving as a lexical explanation that helps readers better understand this animal.

The reason why V tends not to represent the surface functional role of N may lie in the fact that the surface functional role of N is overly obvious, belonging to socially shared encyclopedic knowledge, and thus lacks sufficient informational value to provide new information. Consequently, people are only likely to use the construction "N可以V" (N can V) in unfamiliar contextual scenarios, such as in lexical explanations.

In summary, under the motivating influence of the topic, the construction "N可以V" (N can V) emerges in specific contexts. However, compared to the construction "用N V" (use N to V), which emphasizes the agent's manipulation of N in an objective event description, the speaker employs "N可以V" (N can V) to subjectively evaluate the functional role of N. The distinction is primarily reflected in the different syntactic constraints that apply to these two constructions. Furthermore, the evaluation in "N可以V" (N can V) is typically not based on individual subjective experience but rather on the shared cognition of society as a whole. Therefore, in the construction "N 可 以 V" (N can V), N must possess a corresponding functional role, and V must represent its conventional functional role.

1.3 "N 是用来 V 的"

The subjectivity of language imbues linguistic structures with elements that reflect the speaker's "self", while intersubjectivity embodies the speaker's attention to the listener's "self", thereby re-encoding the form and meaning of language (Traugott & Dasher, 2002, pp. 22-23; Wu, 2004, pp. 18-24). The construction "N 可以 V" (N can V) represents a functional evaluation derived from socially established patterns and is widely recognized within the community. However, if someone forgets, deems it unimportant, or has made or is about to make an error, the speaker may use the "是......的" structure to emphasize, forming the subjective emphatic construction "N 是用来 V 的" (N is used to V) [Here, N is in its bare form, so structures such as "这/那+（量）+名" (this/that + classifier + noun) or "数+（量）+名" (numeral + classifier + noun) are excluded.]. The purpose of such emphasis may be to draw attention or to provide a preparatory explanation. For example:

(17) a 相传，有一次因为家人生病，胡雪岩派佣人去药店抓药。结果他发现抓回来的药已经发霉变质，就让人去调换，药店的伙计却说："本店只有这种药，如果你们要好药，可以自己开一家药店呀。"胡雪岩听了很生气，<u>药是用来治病的</u>，怎么可以拿人命当儿戏？（《人民日报海外版》2016 年 09 月 24 日）

b 丽鹃爸附和道："你讲的一点不错。他们那里风俗好像就是男的享受女的干活。一点不晓得疼女人，<u>女人是用来疼的</u>，他们倒好，女的当畜生一样地使。亚平倒不像他爸爸那么大男人主义，以前丽鹃讲还给她倒洗脚水的。"（六六《双面胶》）

(18) a 众所周知，<u>笔是用来写字的，但是您知道笔也可以用作医疗吗</u>？前几天，美国德克萨斯大学的科学家发明了一种钢笔，可以在 10 秒内识别出癌变组织。（《人民日报海外版》2017 年 09 月 21 日）

b 大司马子鱼当即反驳说："既然<u>军队是用来作战的，就应该乘敌人之危而出击</u>；既然军队中的锣鼓是指挥作战的号令，就应该及时鸣鼓向还没列阵的敌军进攻。不然，要军队、要号令有什么用呢？"（《人民日报》1974 年 08 月 01 日）

In example (17), the purpose of the emphasis is to draw the listener's attention. The reason for this reminder is that, in (a), the traditional Chinese medicine store is selling moldy and deteriorated medicine, having forgotten that"药是用来治病的". In (b),"他们"are too feudalistic, assigning all tasks to women while neglecting the idea that"女人是用来疼的".

Moreover, such reminders are often accompanied by corresponding negative constructions, serving as warnings or admonitions. For example:

(19) "<u>房子是用来住的、不是用来炒的</u>"，就是要让住房回归居住的属性。（《人民日报》2016 年 12 月 17 日）

(20) 日本人发现了汽车的发展趋势越来越向"傻瓜"车发展，对于一般人（特别是老美们）来说，<u>汽车是用来代步的而非是用来炫技的</u>，

因此只要方便就可以了，不需要掌握多么高超的技术，只要有电子产品辅助就可以了。（《文汇报》2005 年 12 月 13 日）

In example (18), the purpose of the emphasis is to provide a preparatory explanation or elaboration. Both (a) and (b) appear in the subordinate clause of a complex sentence. In (a), the clause "笔是用来写字的" is followed by an adversative clause marked by the conjunction "但是". In (b), the clause "军队是用来作战的" is followed by a causal clause marked by the conjunction "既然......就......" (since...then...). Since the functional role of N is widely recognized within the community, the speaker can directly treat "N是用来V的" (N is used to V) as given information, using it as a foundation for further explanation or inference, such as "笔也可以用作医疗" and "应该乘敌人之危而出击".

Similar to "N可以V" (N can V), the construction "N是用来V的" (N is used to V) also emerges under the motivating influence of the topic. Here, N typically functions as a generic reference [Of course, it does not have to be generic. For example, "这种草是用来排毒的，唯有昆仑山上长得效果好"], while V is a non-processual component representing an abstract event. This means that V cannot take aspectual markers such as "了/着/过" or combine with directional verbs, making it a state-of-affairs sentence (Yuan, 2003, pp. 3-16).

However, there is a slight difference: in the construction "N是用来V的" (N is used to V), N is generally a familiar everyday object with socially shared knowledge, such as "房子","月饼","药","女人","床","煤", and so on. Moreover, V can represent the surface functional role of N. For example:

（21）"1你看书的地点不对，（因为）床是用来睡觉的；2看书的氛围不对，没有我在旁边啰嗦，你就犯困了。"（BCC对话）

（22）有人可能会感到奇怪：煤是用来燃烧的，为什么还要拿到水里去洗一遍呢？实际上，所谓洗煤，不只是"洗"，而且是通过洗来"选"，所以洗煤又叫作洗选。（《人民日报》1959年01月24日）

In the examples above, "睡觉" and "燃烧" are the surface functional roles of "床" and "煤", respectively. As such, they generally do not appear in the construction "N可以V"(N can V), as in "*床可以睡觉" or "*煤可以燃烧", because they lack sufficient informational value and fail to provide new information. However, why can they appear in the construction "N是用来V的"(N is used to V)？We argue that this is related to the intersubjectivity embodied in "N是用来V的"(N is used to V).That is, although the functional role V of N is the most basic and widely known, the speaker's emphasis here serves to draw the listener's attention or to provide further explanation. A notable syntactic feature is that, in such cases, N does not need to be introduced by explicit foregrounded information but rather relies on the socially shared encyclopedic knowledge about N in people's minds. For example:

（23）从他们那里我知道了一个简单的真理：文字是用来读的，不是用来看的。看起来黑鸦鸦的一片，都是方块字，念起来就大不相同。诗不光是押韵，还有韵律；散文也有节奏的快慢，或低沉压抑，沉痛无比，或如黄钟大吕，回肠荡气——这才是文字的筋骨所在。（王小波《沉默的大多数》）

（24）郑孝燮说道："这桥（卢沟桥）不能再走车了！"可有人说："桥，就是走车的。"他有些愤怒了："过去是走车的，但现在不

行！碗是用来吃饭的，但我们能用故宫里的金碗吃饭吗？"（《人民日报》1997年01月06日）

In example (23), the topic N "文字" (writing) is not introduced by foregrounded information but rather serves as a general introductory statement summarizing the content of the subsequent discourse. The underlined sentences are all intended to explain that "文字是用来念的，不是用来看的", serving as a reminder to the listener. In example (24), the topic N "碗" is even more implicit, originating from the speaker's metaphor, where "碗" is used to metaphorically represent "桥", thereby better illustrating the point that "卢沟桥现在不能走车了".

Different functions require different forms of expression, as Traugott (1989, pp. 31-55) pointed out, this "semantic-pragmatic tendency" is closely related to the process of subjectification. From the objective event narration "用N V" (event sentence; V as event predicate; N as definite entity) to the subjective evaluation of entities "N可以V" (N as a category of entities; V as attributive predicate, indicating the function of N) and the intersubjective assessment "N是用来V的" (state-of-affairs sentence; N as a familiar category of entities; V as attributive predicate, which can indicate the surface function of N), the subjectivity progressively intensifies. This dynamic emergence process is essentially a result of language continuously adapting to achieve the purpose of information exchange.

2. The Emergence of Constructional Meaning

The constructional meaning of "N是用来V的" (N is used to V) can be summarized as "emphasizing that the function of N is to V", serving to remind the listener or to provide a preparatory explanation. How, then, do

these implicatures such as reminders or elaborations emerge? We argue that this can be explained from the perspective of pragmatic inference.

In daily life, the essential factor enabling people to communicate and convey information effectively lies in the tacit adherence to the "Cooperative Principle" in conversation by both parties. That is, under normal circumstances, conversational participants cooperate with each other. Not only does the speaker consistently follow the "Cooperative Principle", but the listener also always believes that the speaker will not violate it. Moreover, the speaker is aware that the listener trusts them to adhere to the "Cooperative Principle" (Grice, 1975; Shen, 2015, p. 67). Therefore, if the speaker violates a certain aspect of the "Cooperative Principle", it becomes a signal that triggers inference. The listener will keenly detect this anomaly and, in conjunction with the context, engage in reasoning to capture the speaker's implied meaning.

The construction "N 是用来 V 的" (N is used to V) emphasizes that the function of N is to V, which is an obvious and self-evident truth for everyone, constituting old information. If the information provided by the speaker is already known to the listener, then the speaker's utterance should theoretically be unnecessary. However, this contradicts the "Cooperative Principle". According to the "Maxim of Quantity", the speaker would not say anything superfluous or redundant. Therefore, upon receiving this inference signal, the listener will actively engage in reasoning to interpret the implied meaning. Take, for example, "房子是用来住的" (houses are for living in) and "笔是用来写字的" (pens are for writing).

Pragmatic Inference of "房子是用来住的" (Houses Are for Living In):

Presupposition: In conversation, both the speaker and the listener adhere to the "Cooperative Principle" and cooperate with each other.

Fact: The speaker's statement that "房子是用来住的" (houses are for living in) constitutes old information for the listener, seemingly violating the "Principle of Quantity".

Inference: The speaker would not make a meaningless statement, so it is likely that the listener has not paid attention and has used "houses" for other purposes, such as "speculation".

Implicature: Reminder, admonition, criticism, etc.

Pragmatic Inference of "笔是用来写字的" (Pens are for writing):

Presupposition: In conversation, both speaker and listener adhere to the "Cooperative Principle" and cooperate with each other.

Fact: The statement "The pen is used for writing" made by the speaker represents old information for the listener. Moreover, if the statement is a metaphorical usage, the "pen" appears unrelated to the topic being discussed, which seems to violate the "Quantity Maxim" and the "RelevanceMaxim".

Inference: The speaker would not say something useless or irrelevant. Therefore, it is highly likely that the speaker intends to use this as a preamble to provide further clarification on the "pen" or a topic N that may be metaphorically related.

Implicature: The preamble enhances the explanation, among other functions.

In the expression of interactive subjectivity, speech inherently carries

more implicature (Traugott & Dasher, 2002, pp. 22-23). Moreover, because the structure "N is used for V" not only implies various implicatures such as reminders, advice, or preambles for further explanation, but also evokes a strong resonance from the listener (as both N and V are familiar to the audience), it is often placed in positions within the text that most effectively convey the speaker's intent, such as titles and topic sentences.

(25) 青春如朝日，是一个人最宝贵的年华。该如何度过，才能让青春的枝头绽放梦想之花？五四青年节来临之际，让我们一起共话青春。一代人有一代人的青春。与老一辈相比，这一代年轻人成长在中国发展最快、最好的年代。（《人民日报》2017 年 05 月 03 日，标题《"<u>青春是用来奋斗的</u>"——五四之际致青年》）

(26) 有呼吁"救市"的人提出，买卖二手房的都是"刚需"，价格就得稳定。啥叫"刚需"？"<u>房子是用来住的，不是用来炒的。</u>"——去年底中央经济工作会议提出的论断，为"刚需"定了调：刚性需求，就是只用于或主要用于自住、不将投资功能考虑在内的购房需求。既然是"刚需"，......（《人民日报》2017 年 02 月 27 日）

(27) <u>琴是用来听的，为何要读</u>？近日的一次参观，看到钢琴制作流程中的一幅幅画面，就如同一页页地翻书，姑且称之为读吧。从小对音乐有一种向往，对于有着"乐器之王"美誉的钢琴更是带有一分崇敬。（《人民日报》2016 年 08 月 28 日，标题《读琴》）

In example (25), "青春是用来奋斗的" serves as the title of the entire report; in example (26), the key term "刚需" runs throughout the text, and "房子是用来住的，不是用来炒的" precisely explains the concept of "urgent demand"; in example (27), the title is "读琴", and this subject is introduced and elaborated through the preamble "琴是用来听的".

Motivation of Constructions

A construction is a form-meaning pairing, and the emergence of constructional meaning cannot be separated from the significant contributions of its constituent elements. Below, we will examine the respective roles played by the variables N and V, as well as the constant "是用来...的" (is used to...), in the process of meaning emergence in the "N 是用来 V 的" (N is used to V) construction.

1. The Activity Level of N in Daily Contexts

As mentioned in Section 2, N is closely related to people's daily lives. The speaker's purpose in using the construction "N 要一 q 一 q V" is to remind or advise the listener that only by starting from more familiar daily activities can the listener better understand and accept the message. High-frequency items in the corpus such as "房子, 月饼, 药品, 笔 , 煤 " are all closely connected to people's daily lives. The phrase "谁/任何人都知道" can be added before "N 是用来 V 的", as in "谁都知道房子是用来住的" or "任何人都知道月饼是用来吃的".

However, if the subject is distant from daily life or unfamiliar to people, such as some specialized terminology, it generally cannot be used in the "N 是用来 V 的" construction. For example:

(28) a*高锰酸钾是用来杀菌消毒的。—— 高锰酸钾可以用来杀菌消毒。

b*层次分析法是用来分析语言结构的。—— 层次分析法可以用来分析语言结构。

Moreover, N represents a kind of generic reference. According to Chen (1987, pp. 81-89) and Liu (2002, pp. 411-422), the core semantic feature of genericity is non-individuality, referring to the common characteristics and

attributes of a category of entities. In the construction, N denotes "an entire class of entities", such as "房子, 月饼, 药品, 笔, 煤", which can be understood as the collective set of all "houses, mooncakes, medicines, pens, coal" in the world, rather than specific members of the category. Therefore, words like "所有" or "任何" can be added before N to emphasize the collective whole: "（所有/任何）房子都是用来住的", "（所有/任何）月饼都是用来吃的", and so on. This genericity is syntactically manifested in the fact that noun phrases with specific reference generally cannot enter the construction. For example:

(29) ＊一套房子是用来住的　　　＊一个月饼是用来吃的
　　？这盒药是用来治病的　　　？那支笔是用来写字的

　　　　Precisely because N is closely related to people's daily lives, represents shared old information between interlocutors, and denotes a kind of generic reference, it possesses a high topicality property and readily serves as the topic of the "information flow" in communicative processes. During the transmission of information in communication, different concepts exist in a dynamic cognitive state in the minds of both the speaker and the listener. Particularly when N represents a generic reference and is closely tied to people's daily lives, it corresponds to what Chafe (1994) terms "active information" or "semi-active information". Even if not introduced by explicit foregrounded information, N can still become the subject of discussion in the sentence.

　　2. The Conventional Functionality of V

V is closely related to N, typically representing the functional role of N (e.g.,"住"(to live) in "房子是用来住的" or "吃" in "月饼是用来吃的". It exhibits strong predictability and a high degree of conventionality.

In contrast, V expressing temporary functional roles or generalized functional roles generally cannot enter the "N 是用来 V 的" construction. For example:

(30) a 刀是用来切菜的 —— ？？刀是用来剃头的 —— ？？刀是用来斩断过去的

刀可以切菜 —— 刀可以剃头 —— 刀可以斩断过去

　b 笔是用来写字的 —— ？？笔是用来逗猫的 —— ？？笔是用来书写未来的

笔可以写字 —— 笔可以逗猫 —— 笔可以书写未来

The conventional functional roles of "刀" and "笔" are "切（菜）" and "写字", respectively, making them highly compatible with the "N 是用来 V 的" construction. In contrast, "剃头", "斩断过去", "逗猫", and "书写未来" represent temporary functional roles and generalized functional roles for "刀" and "笔", respectively, which appear markedly awkward. However, such restrictions do not apply in the "N 可以 V" construction. Furthermore, if the preceding N takes a definite form, the acceptability of temporary and generalized functional roles significantly improves, as in "这刀是用来剃头的", "这刀是用来斩断过去的", "那笔是用来逗猫的", and "那笔是用来书写未来的". This is because conventional functional roles are shared by all members within a category, while temporary functional roles pertain to specific members within the category, thus requiring the subject noun to be definite and specific. Generalized functional roles, on the other hand, refer to the effects

brought about by the entity denoted by the subject noun, and specific entities often yield concrete effects, which is why N typically appears as a definite form in such cases.

As further discussed in Section 1.3, V functions as an attributive predicate and cannot take any temporal markers (such as "了，着，过，" etc.). Consequently, from a formal perspective, V in the construction is almost invariably a bare verb.

3. The Functional Emphasis of "是用来...的" (is used to...)

"是用来...的"(is used to...) serves as a focus marker emphasizing functionality. Lu (1985, pp. 241-251) points out that "是...的" indicates an affirmative focus, and "the focus of affirmation lies in the component following '是'", functioning similarly to a focus indicator. Therefore, the focus of "N 是用来 V 的" (N is used to V) is "用来 V" (used to V), which emphasizes the functionality of N.

Moreover, it often manifests as a contrastive focus. Particularly when the speaker uses the construction to draw the listener's attention, the functional V in the focus often co-occurs with other functions, forming a contrast. In other words, "是...的" (shi...de) here acts as a focus marker for contrastive focus (Fan & Zhang, 2000, p. 194). In addition to positive-negative contrasts, as seen in examples (1), (19), (20), (23), and (26), there are also parallel contrasts between different Ns, thereby distinguishing their respective functionalities. For example:

(31) 王柏林不要命的工作热情和作风感染了中心的每一个人。他们的工资很低，1997 年 4 月以前每月只领 280 元钱，现在也只 400 来块钱。但没有人喊苦喊累，没有人计较个人得失。王柏林身上常带着两样东西：西瓜霜和存折。西瓜霜是用来润嗓子的，存折是用来"润"中心的各

种支出的。一年多下来，他的存折上少了近百万元。（《人民日报》1998
年）

(32) 在中国的学问里，大致是以经和史两种学问最重要。史书是
用来记事的，经书的主要功能在于规范人的行为。为什么"五四"以后，
学校中是否读"经"一直是一个争论不休的问题？因为"经"代表了一整
套的行为规范，那么我们知道，传统的教育正是从读"经"开始。小学发
蒙读物就是《四书五经》，所以这方面锻炼是比较重要的。（郑家栋《传
统对于我们意味着什么》）

Conclusion

The emergence of constructions encompasses both formal and semantic emergence. The formal emergence of the reminding and emphasizing construction "N 是用来 V 的"(N is used to V) has roughly undergone the stages of "用 N V"(use N to V) for objective event narration, "N 可以 V"(N can V) for subjective evaluation, and "N 是用来 V 的"(N is used to V) for intersubjective assessment. This dynamic emergence process is essentially the result of the speaker continuously adapting linguistic forms to achieve the goal of information exchange, driven by the topic and based on the expression of different functions. The emergence of constructional meaning is primarily realized through the listener's pragmatic inference. When the speaker emits an implicature—violating the "cooperative principle" in conversation—the listener keenly detects it, activates inference in context, and captures the speaker's implied meaning. Furthermore, from the perspective of constructional motivation, N in the construction exhibits daily activity, V demonstrates conventional functionality, and "是用来...的" (is used to...) serves as a focus marker emphasizing functionality.

From the perspective of functional linguistics, different linguistic forms necessarily serve different functions. However, from the standpoint of speaker encoding, different functions also require distinct forms for expression. The reason linguistic forms are encoded in such a way is to meet the speaker's diverse functional expression needs. Driven by the topic, N in "N 是用来 V 的" (N is used to V) can naturally continue the theme being discussed in the discourse, making the text more coherent and conveying the speaker's intention to remind or advise the listener. Clearly, such syntactic arrangements highlight the speaker's specific informational expression, as "the communicative need is primary in determining linguistic structure" (Zhang & Fang, 1996, p. 11). This vividly reflects the pragmatic-oriented nature of the Chinese language.

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