Shāobuliǎo as Entry in The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary: Criteria for Inclusion and Sense Selection

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Abstract. Out of innumerable expressions containing buliǎo, The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (CCD) includes only 4 as entries, i.e., shāobuliǎo, duànbuliǎo, miànbuliǎo, and dàbuliǎo. This paper, through a scrutiny of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic variability of shāobuliǎo and a comparison with analogous entries in CCD, demonstrates that it is inappropriate for CCD to have selected shāobuliǎo in the sense of ‘cannot do without’ as an entry. Through an analysis of its various usages, the paper proposes that only shāobuliǎo as used before quantity expressions in non-comparative sentences is lexicalized into an independent lexical item and should therefore be included in CCD as an entry.

Keywords: The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, shāobuliǎo, lexicalization, entry inclusion, sense selection.

1 Introduction

The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (CCD) includes 4 expressions containing buliǎo as entries, i.e., shāobuliǎo, duànbuliǎo, miànbuliǎo, and dàbuliǎo. Among them, dàbuliǎo is lexicalized through the acquisition of new meanings as respectively in Méi shénme dàbuliǎo de (It’s no big deal) and in Dàbuliǎo zài páo yìtàng (At worst, I’ll go there once more) [1]. It is undoubtedly reasonable for CCD to include it as an entry. Out of innumerable V-buliǎo expressions, however, why does CCD select only shāobuliǎo, duànbuliǎo, and miànbuliǎo as entries? Jingti Han, in his account for

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1 Because of the strong metalingual nature of this paper, it needs to be noted from the outset that the present text is a translation of the author’s Chinese manuscript (by Yujia Jia and Zhengchuan Jia of the School of Foreign Languages at Ludong University). For the sake of space, Chinese constructions discussed or mentioned in the text are not represented in Chinese characters, but are only transcribed in pinyin. Wherever the formal status of a Chinese construction is invariantly above word and its words are always identifiable, spaces between words are assigned. Otherwise, where the formal status of a Chinese construction either alone or within a larger construction, such as buliǎo or a non-sentential expression containing buliǎo, is not clear or is varying contextually, the whole construction is transcribed holistically without spaces between constituents. If the meaning of a Chinese construction is clear and fixed and must be understood, a rough English translation follows it in brackets. Where meaning is in question or irrelevant, no translation is attempted.
the criteria of entry inclusion in the 5th edition of CCD, points out that expressions used in dictionary definitions should be included as separate entries [2]. Shǎobuliǎo, duānbuliǎo, and miānbuliǎo are all involved in dictionary definitions presumably according to the following logic: The definition of shǎobudé necessitates the use of shǎobuliǎo, which accordingly becomes an entry word to be defined with duānbuliǎo, which in turn becomes a headword to be defined with miānbuliǎo, which is also included as an entry.

A scrutiny of shǎobuliǎo in the 6 editions of CCD, however, reveals that different editions define it differently. The 1st to 4th editions define it using a synonymous word and exemplifies it in a sentence: ‘duānbuliǎo (cannot do without): Bàn zhège shír, yìding ~ nǐ (In doing this, we cannot do without you).’ The 2005 edition defines it in a phrase: ‘V. bùnéng quēshào (cannot do without)….’ The 2012 edition adds a second definition and an illustrative sentence to the entry: ‘V. ①… ② miānbuliǎo (be unavoidable): Gōngzuò shāng de shì, yīhòu ~ yāo máfan nǐ (In my future work, I will certainly need your help).’

While the 1st to 4th editions define shǎobuliǎo with the synonymous word duānbuliǎo, which leads to the use of other V-buliǎo expressions, the 2005 edition switches to a phrase probably to avoid circular definitions using synonymous words. The 2005 edition seems, however, to have neglected the logic that, since it does not define shǎobuliǎo with duānbuliǎo, it should not have included the latter as an entry and that, if so, it would not have incorporated miānbuliǎo either. According to its criteria for inclusion, therefore, it should have included only two buliǎo expressions, i.e., dābuliǎo and shǎobuliǎo.

What we are here concerned with, then, are two questions: Should shǎobuliǎo be treated as an entry? Should expressions used in dictionary definitions be included as entries even if they are not lexicalized? In fact, shǎobuliǎo is not included as an entry even in such popular CSL learner’s dictionaries as The Commercial Press Learner’s Dictionary of Contemporary Chinese [3] and A Dictionary of Chinese Usage: 8000 Words [4]. Evidently, different dictionaries have different criteria for sense selection and there is still no consensus on the inclusion of shǎobuliǎo as an entry.

2 Shǎobuliǎo as Not Lexicalized in the Sense of ‘Cannot Do Without’

Although shǎobuliǎo is included as an entry in CCD in order to define shǎobudé, we will not concern ourselves here with whether shǎobudé should be selected as an entry or whether it can be appropriately defined with shǎobuliǎo. Rather, we are interested in whether shǎobuliǎo as a synonym of shǎobudé is a lexical item when it means ‘cannot do without’ and should be included as an entry.

2.1 Shǎobuliǎo as Isomorphic with Other V-buliǎo Expressions

Shǎobuliǎo, as used in the definition of shǎobudé, is a potential verb-complement construction comprising the verb shǎo (lack) and buliǎo as its complement.