

A Study of “AB *Ren*” From the Perspective of Construction Grammar

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Abstract—The “AB *Ren*” construction such as 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ is fast becoming one of the key instruments in a riot of social media. In this corpus-based study to explore the nature of the “AB *Ren*” construction from Goldberg’s construction grammar perspective, a total of 108 “AB *Ren*” expressions were retrieved from the Beijing Language and Culture University Modern Chinese Corpus (BCC), and social media network Weibo. The study aims to investigate the formal features, constructional meaning, social functions and implied cognitive mechanisms behind the “AB *Ren*” construction. From the standpoint of the formal composition, this construction consists of two parts, the variable part and the fixed part. It can be divided into three categories (verb, noun, and adjective compounds). The “AB *Ren*” construction has the independent constructional meaning, which is used to describe a certain group of people who are engaged with an occupation corresponding to the “AB” part and are fond of particular activities as well as individuals who are defined as possessing certain features. Because of the high frequency of occurrences, some expressions acquire new emotional meanings as far as constructional meanings are concerned. A group of commonly-appeared “AB *Ren*” expressions, combining the use of metaphorical and metonymical mechanisms, illustrate language simplicity and are a great way to express self-encouragement and mockery. This study reveals the common generation trends of popular language on the internet in today’s world and the conceptualization of the “AB *Ren*” construction plays an important role in construing linguistic expressions.

Index Terms—“AB *Ren*” construction, constructional meaning, cognitive mechanism, social functions

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, internet users have been constantly using terms such as 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’, 干饭人 *gan fan ren* ‘foodie’, and 尾款人 *wei kuan ren* ‘balance payer’. The “AB *Ren*” construction rivals on various social media and has evolved into a richly meaningful unit or compound. Certain expressions with higher usage frequency differ significantly from the lower ones like 手艺人 *shou yi ren* ‘craftsman’, 中原人 *zhong yuan ren* ‘people who live in the central plains of China’, 阅卷人 *yue juan ren* ‘people who score the examination papers’ in terms of constructional features and social functions. With the continuous enrichment of network and the updating of people’s daily communication skills, structures like 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ have taken on new meanings. The unique language phenomenon “AB *Ren*”, which appears to be different from the normally used Chinese “AB 的 *de Ren*”, is constantly filled in people’s daily communication and gradually penetrating into the written language. The “AB *Ren*” construction adds the meaning of self-mockery, encouragement and functions as a tool to shorten the social distance. Moreover, the construction is composed of two parts. One is the fixed item “*Ren*”, and the other is the variable item “AB”. The components in this variable item are mainly noun compounds, verb compounds, adjective compounds.

This study is sought to examine the “AB *Ren*” construction from the perspective of construction grammar, particularly Goldberg’s construction grammar theory. Through the Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus (BCC) and Weibo, the data collected are of representativeness, instantaneity and research significance. It is intended to analyze and discuss each corpus in turn, so as to gain a deeper understanding of this Chinese construction. Moreover, it is possible to further explain and analyze the detailed forming mechanism and distribution of this construction. This corpus-media combined treatment acts as an impetus for future empirical work themed on internet buzzwords, in which the analysis can aid us in framing and making sense of language changes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Goldberg, “construction is a pairing of form and meaning, and is stored pairings of form and function, morphemes, words, idioms, lexically filled and general linguistics patterns varying in size and complexity are included” (Goldberg, 1995, p. 6). Constructions of varying sizes (Goldberg, 2003, p. 220) can be shown in Table 1. In this paper, constructions are defined as “form-meaning pairings in which particular forms which subsume the surface syntactic features of constructions are linked to particular meanings” (Yin, 2010, p. 3).

TABLE 1
THE CLASSIFICATION OF CONSTRUCTION

Morpheme	E.g., anti-, pre-, -ing	
Word	E.g., avocado, anaconda, and	
Complex word	E.g., daredevil, shoo-in	
Idiom (filled)	E.g., going great guns	
Idiom (partially filled)	E.g., jog (someone's) memory	
Covariational Conditional Construction	Form: The Xer the Yer (e.g. The more you think about it, the less you understand)	Meaning: linked independent and dependent variables
Ditransitive (double object) construction	Form: Subj (V Obj1 Obj2) (e.g., He gave her a Coke; He baked her a muffin)	Meaning: transfer (intended or actual)
Passive	Form: Subj aux VPpp (pp) (e.g., The armadillo was hit by a car)	Discourse function: to make under goer topical/ or actor non-topical

So far, a small amount of literature concerning “AB *Ren*” has been published. As an example, the analysis of the “AB *Ren*” construction was conducted from the perspective of path analysis (Tang & Wu, 2021). Tang and Wu (2021) analyzed the structure of “AB *Ren*” in terms of grammatical features, phonetics and pragmatics, and further discussed the reasons for the emergence of this structure. There exists “AB *Ren*” construction resulting from the diffusion of formatted and high-frequency forms, the psychological demands of seeking novelties and differences, and the requirements of language economy. However, this paper is not expounded on the cognitive mechanism behind this construction. Several researches presented cognitive motivation and metonymical mechanism contained in the expression “AB *Ren*” (Song & Zeng, 2021; Wei, 2021). One study conducted by Wei (2021) maintained that verb compounds occupy the majority of the “AB” part and as for the formal features of this construction, it found that verb phrases, adjective phrases and noun phrases could serve as the “AB” part, and that other parts of speech cannot form “XX 人 *Ren*” expressions, such as pronouns, auxiliary words, prepositions, conjunctions, etc. By contrast, Song and Zeng (2021) proposed that noun and verb phrases served as “AB” part without illustrating the adjective phrases. Nonetheless, there has been no comprehensive corpus or data-based study using exhaustive data collection to combine a language corpus with social media attempting to investigate the usage-based model of these cyber-created hot expressions in terms of verb, noun and adjective compounds serving as “AB” part. Importantly, some trends like the user groups have expanded and new functions of using this construction need to be complemented and clarified. This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a corpus-based study from Goldberg’s construction grammar perspective to find out the formal features, constructional meaning as well as social functions of the “AB *Ren*” construction. To be specific, this paper attempts to answer the following three questions in the course of the study.

1. What is the formal feature of “AB *Ren*” construction?
2. What is the constructional meaning of “AB *Ren*” construction?
3. What are the cognitive mechanisms and social functions behind “AB *Ren*” construction?

III. METHOD

This study did a thorough investigation into the “AB *Ren*” construction in the Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus (BCC). The total scale of BCC is 15 billion characters. It includes several categories such as multiple fields, literature, dialogue, newspaper, ancient Chinese and text retrieval. Initially, no results appeared when the “Ren” (dot represents any Chinese character) was typed into the search box even though it followed the retrieval instructions proposed by Xun et al. (2016). Given the fact that the “AB” part contained in the buzzwords appearing online can be classified into three groups, namely verb compound, noun compound and adjective compound, another search was conducted in the BCC corpus for “v 人 *ren*”, “n 人 *ren*” and “a 人 *ren*” respectively. However, even though the results indicated that each structure obtained in the BCC corpus had more than 100 thousand elements, a further reductive step was required since BCC search formulas are composed of words, compounds, and sentences. It is not recommended to select phases such as 成人 *cheng ren* ‘adult’, 小人 *xiao ren* ‘bad man’, 打工人员 *da gong ren yuan* ‘people who leave their hometown to do manual labor’ because they are different from the structure of “AB *Ren*”. Based on the exhaustive retrieval of the data from both BCC and Weibo, 108 discourses which were considered as the pertinent construction were obtained and divided into three groups based on their components. In order to investigate the constructional meaning as well as social functions of the “AB *Ren*” construction, Weibo, recognized by its instantaneity and sharability, is taken as a media corpus to explore the usage frequency of instances. The affordance of Weibo, for instance, is an online platform where users could share their feelings among various topics using pseudonyms in the form of written contexts, images, videos.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section will first provide the corpus findings and then discuss meanings and functions of the “AB *Ren*” construction as well as its cognitive mechanisms.

A. *Distribution and Formal Features of the “AB Ren” Construction*

The distribution of different categories of the “AB *Ren*” construction is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION AND FORMAL FEATURES OF THE “AB *Ren*” CONSTRUCTION

“AB” part	Percentage of the distribution in the collected data
Verb compound	50.9%
Noun compound	21.3%
Adjective compound	27.8%

It can be observed from Table 2 that the verb compounds occupy more than half of the “AB *Ren*” construction, while nominal items and adjective compound account for 21.3% and 27.8%, respectively. The construction consists of two parts, the first of which is functioned as an attributive nevertheless in a quite different way compared with adjectives. It is worth noting that the verb and adjective compounds constitute most instances of the “AB *Ren*” construction. One of the important features of the buzzwords is simplification. Instead of saying 喝热水的人 *he re shui de ren* ‘people who drink hot water’, 热水人 *re shui ren* ‘people who need to drink hot water’ uses fewer words to cover the meaning of “drink hot water” and also contains emotional meaning-self-mockery that often the young use to ridicule themselves. There are only three types of compounds that can be components of the “AB” part and make it meaningful. Prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries and others have not entered into this construction yet. The “AB *Ren*” construction is made up of two parts. One is the variable component “AB”, serving the attributive function. The other is the fixed component 人 *ren* ‘person’. Interestingly, the “AB” part is not serving as an adjective as the consequence of a lack of the traditional attributive marker “的 *de*”. But 打工的人 *da gong de ren* is different from “AB *Ren*” 打工人 *da gong ren* in structure and the former is more complex and less simple than the latter for users to employ in daily life. 打工的人 *da gong de ren* is a typical case of subordinate structure while “AB *Ren* 打工人 *da gong ren*” is an instance of compounds. The legalization of words like “AB *Ren*” must go through the corresponding adjustment and evolution within itself. Normally, the “AB *Ren*” construction is a combination of noun compound, adjective compound or verb compound plus “person”. Some expressions could be interpreted from the literal meaning of the “AB” part because this type of collocation highlights its core meaning. In the case of 拼单 *pin dan* ‘team buying online’, its core meaning is strongly related to 拼单 *pin dan* ‘team buying online’. It is clear that the majority of the instances composing the “AB” part are verb compounds. Moreover, when the verb compounds enter into this construction, the specific characteristics of the verb compounds have been “oppressed” by the quality of the noun (Tang & Wu, 2021) and thus the overall construction inherits the nominal profile. After the analysis of the verb compounds, it is obvious that mostly the verbs are transitive ones. But they serve as the function of an adjective. For example, in the formation of the construction 加班人 *jia ban ren* ‘people who have to work overtime’, it is obvious that the verb 加班 *jia ban* ‘work over time’ per se is a transitive one. When it comes to the construction, the quality of the verb compound declines and it does not serve as a predicate but as a modifier and the characteristic of the noun mounts to the point that it renders its profile as the center of the whole structure. Then, a noun unit or construction 加班人 *jia ban ren* ‘people who have to work overtime’ is formed after the combination of 加班 *jia ban* ‘work over time’ and 人 *ren* ‘person’.

B. *Constructional Meaning of the “AB Ren” Construction*

This part attempts to illustrate the constructional meanings of “AB *Ren*” construction by choosing instances with high usage frequency and the following sentences from Weibo are used as examples. Table 3 shows the 20 most frequently used expressions in Weibo.

TABLE 3
DISTRIBUTION AND FORMAL FEATURES OF THE “AB REN” CONSTRUCTION

Chinese character	Pinyin	English translation
打工人	<i>da gong ren</i>	wage earner
干饭人	<i>gan fan ren</i>	foodie
加班人	<i>jia ban ren</i>	people who have to work overtime
熬夜人	<i>ao ye ren</i>	people who always stay up late
拼单	<i>pin dan ren</i>	people who do group buying online
搬砖人	<i>ban zhuan ren</i>	brick movers
考研人	<i>kao yan ren</i>	people who take part in the entrance examination for postgraduate studies
工具人	<i>gong ju ren</i>	tool man
奶茶人	<i>nai cha ren</i>	people who are fond of milk tea
垃圾人	<i>la ji ren</i>	trash person
社会人	<i>she hui ren</i>	social butterfly
定金人	<i>ding jin ren</i>	people who need to pay deposit
尾款人	<i>wei kuan ren</i>	people who need to pay the balance
柠檬人	<i>ning meng ren</i>	people who are always jealous of others
热水人	<i>re shui ren</i>	young people who ridicule themselves that it is old enough to drink warm water
教资人	<i>jiao zi ren</i>	people who want to pass the teacher qualification exam
可怜人	<i>ke lian ren</i>	people who look pitiful and arouse others' attention to help them
隐形人	<i>pin dan ren</i>	people who are not valued by others in life and have a weak sense of existence or individuals deliberately try to conceal themselves to lower down the attention
真香人	<i>zhen xiang ren</i>	people do things that have previously said no

(a). *Verb Compound as the “AB ” Part*

打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ on the internet is an inclusive term used by all those who are engaged in laborious work and rely on salary to live on, whether they are workers moving bricks on construction sites, white-collar workers sitting in the office, or middle-level leaders and entrepreneurs. All of them can call themselves 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ in a black humor way. Their attitudes towards their work are just like Hemingway’s code hero who holds that courage is “grace under pressure” (a theme that is normally used in Hemingway’s literary work). Apart from that, the term 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’, emerging as early as in 1993 (People’s Daily) with a sense of discrimination, traditionally refers to a type of people who migrate to cosmopolitan cities and put forth every effort to lift themselves out of poverty normally through toilsome manual labor. Much of the great online circulation of this compound lies in the fact that 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ transcends the relatively restricted boundary of status, salary difference, and expands its range of users which incorporates students as its users such as 苦逼打工人还在通宵写毕业论文 *ku bi da gong ren hai zai tong xiao xie bi ye lun wen* ‘I have to stay up all night to write my dissertation’. Subsequently, 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ could be used in various contexts. Therefore, its traditional meaning is weakened or almost disappears as shown in (1).

- (1). 没有困难的工作，只有不怕困难的打工人。

mei you kun nan de gong zuo, zhi you bu pa kun nan de da gong ren

‘Whatever difficult work wage earner faces, he or she will not be afraid’.

Moreover, this cyber-hot compound acts as an impetus for the proliferation of the “AB Ren” construction, and thus creating new “AB Ren” expressions like 加班人 *jia ban ren* ‘people who have to work overtime’, 搬砖人 *ban zhuan ren* ‘brick movers’.

- (2). 干饭人，干饭魂，干饭都是人上人。

gan fan ren, gan fan hun, gan fan ren dou shi ren shang ren

‘Foodies relish food, thus they have passion for life’.

The example in (2) shows an instance of 干饭人 *gan fan ren*, which is originally from the Tik Tok blogger “The Mountain Man of Poetry and Book”. Every time he eats in the yard, he will say “gobble down! gobble down!”, holding

a bowl of rice in his hand and showing it to the netizen, and every time the words are finished, his chickens will come over and take the dishes away. 干饭人 *gan fan ren* pertains to foodies who have passions for eating delicious food or can be used to represent certain people who can do nothing but eat.

- (3). 今天也是可怜的加班人，但是要去捉一点春天。

jin tian ye shi ke lian de jia ban ren, dan shi yao qu zhao yi dian chun tian

‘Even though I need to work overtime today, I still spare some time to enjoy the scenery in spring’.

Besides, 加班人 *jia ban ren* is one of the derivational buzzwords of 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ as shown in (3). 加班人 *jia ban ren* means that when the young man who works from a nine-to-five o’clock encounters overtime demands from his boss, he has nothing to do but conform to the requirement. Certainly, he could be annoyed but nothing will be changed due to the hierarchical inequality.

- (4). 熬夜人，熬夜魂，清醒留给早睡人。

ao ye ren, ao ye hun, qing xing liu gei zao shui ren

‘people who always stay up late have difficulty staying sober’.

As implied in (4), 熬夜人 *ao ye ren* specifies people who always stay up late. Then there are those who have no choice but to stay up late to finish their work or those who are prone to staying up late especially the younger generation.

- (5). 拼车，拼奶茶，拼单人！

pin che, pin nai cha, pin dan ren

‘people who do group buying online are those who do carpooling and buy tea milk in a group-buying way’.

拼单人 *pin dan ren* in (5) indicates a group of people who want to get more discounts in a group-buying way to lower the price.

- (6). 只有尽力了，才有资格说运气不好。奔跑吧，考研人！

zhi you jin li le, cai you zi ge shuo yun qi bu hao. Ben pao ba, kao yan ren!

‘For people who take part in the postgraduate entrance exam, only when you have tried your best could you be able to say that you are unlucky. Go ahead’.

As shown in example (6), it can be seen that 考研人 *kao yan ren* appears to be encouraging a group of people who exert every effort to prepare for the postgraduate entrance examination.

- (7). 该努力的都努力了，剩下的看命运的安排吧，还是要拒绝焦虑，做个快乐的搬砖人。

gai nu li de dou nu li le, sheng xia de kan ming yun de an pai ba, hai shi yao ju jue jiao lv, zuo ge kuai le de ban zhuan ren.

‘I have spared no efforts to do it, and the rest depends on the arrangement of fate. It is better to avoid being anxious and try to be a happy brick mover’.

As the example in (7) indicates, 搬砖人 *ban zhuan ren* makes a large departure from the original meaning that simply refers to people who devote themselves to a manual labor such as moving bricks. The network meaning of 搬砖人 *ban zhuan ren*, which bears much resemblance to the usage of 打工人 *da gong ren*, just represents people who are engaged in a strenuous but low-paying work like the sentence “I’m just a brick, move it wherever you need it”.

(b). Noun Compound as the “AB” Part

- (8). 生活中的每一个人都是工具人，你的能力和位置决定了你的作用，也决定了想使用你的人数。

sheng huo zhong de mei yi ge ren dou shi gong ju ren, ni de neng li he wei zhi jue ding le ni de zuo yong, ye jue ding le xiang shi yong ni de ren shu.

‘Everyone serves as a tool man, your ability and position determine your role, and also determine the number of people who want to take charge of you’.

As the example in (8) suggests, 工具人 *gong ju ren* ‘tool man’ is a kind of people who are used by others as a tool and are never treated equally.

- (9). 不要问我职业规划，问就是想当个自由奶茶人。

bu yao wen wo zhi ye gui hua, wen jiu shi xiang dang ge zi you nai cha ren

‘Don’t ask me about my career plan, I just want to be person who can afford to buy milk tea whatever he or she likes’.

奶茶人 *nai cha ren* in example (9) refers to people who are extremely fond of milk tea.

- (10). 保护好自己，远离垃圾人。

bao hu hao zi ji, yuan li la ji ren

‘Protect yourself and stay away from garbage people’.

垃圾人 *la ji ren* in example (10) refers to individuals who are immoral, full of negative emotions and thoughts, ungrateful, self-centered, non-human. Outsiders are advised to stay away from garbage men because they are full of frustration, anger, jealousy, greed, dissatisfaction, and complaints.

- (11). 读书人读再多书，也不如社会人通透。

du shu ren du zai duo shu, ye bu ru she hui ren tong tou

‘No matter how many books a scholar reads, he is not as “wise” as a social person’.

社会人 *she hui ren* in example (11) could be called social butterfly as they possess huge social experience and are skillful in interpersonal interactions.

- (12). 定金人付定金时非常自信，她总觉得什么她都付得起。

ding jin ren fu ding jin shi fei chang zi xin, ta zong jue de ta shen me ta dou fu de qi

‘She was very confident when paying the deposit and felt that she could afford the final payment’.

As illustrated in example (12), 定金人 *ding jin ren* bears much resemblance to 尾款人 *wei kuan ren* as both of them are terms that appear frequently during the online shopping festivals. It refers to a group of individuals who are required to pay a deposit in advance to get coupons afterwards. Based on the above context, it is obvious that it contains a sense of mockery because she does not take her power of consumption into consideration.

- (13). 美食文化是地域文化中最接地气的一部分，它与人们生活息息相关，只要擅于发现和研究，每一个人都可以是爱美食的文化人。

mei shi wen hua shi di yu wen hua zhong zui jie di qi de yi bu fen, ta yu ren men sheng huo xi xi xiang guan, zhi yao shan yu fa xian he yan jiu, mei yi ge ren dou ke yi shi ai mei shi de wen hua ren.

‘Food culture is one of the most down-to-earth part of regional culture, which is closely related to people’s lives.

As long as individuals are good at doing discovery and research, everyone can be a literatus who loves food’.

Originally, 文化人 *wen hua ren* in example (13) is a term used restrictively to represent individuals who are well-educated. Nonetheless, its meaning has gained another sense of ridicule to mock people who pretend to be literate.

- (14). 今天也是努力的尾款人。

jin tian ye shi nu li de wei kuan ren

‘In order to pay the balance, I need to work hard everyday’.

As indicated in example (14), 尾款人 *wei kuan ren* is a buzzword that occurs especially during “double eleven”, and “double twelve” (online shopping gala in China) to represent people who need to pay the balance after they have afforded the deposit.

- (15). 柠檬人，你们看看自己有酸的资格吗？

ning men ren, ni men kan kan zi ji you suan de zi ge ma?

‘ning meng ren, I’m afraid that you even don’t have the right to be jealous’.

As the example in (15) indicates 柠檬人 *ning meng ren* is a catchword originated from the network to cover a type of people who are always jealous of others in surly utterance.

- (16). 曾经是喝酒人，现在是热水人。

ceng jing shi he jiu ren, xian zai shi re shui ren

‘It is old enough to drink hot water instead of wine’.

热水人 *re shui ren* in example (16) refers to young people who ridicule themselves that it is old enough to drink warm water to keep healthy.

- (17). 希望每一位用心付出的教资人都能得偿所愿。

xi wang mei yi wei yong xin fu chu de jiao zi ren dou neng de chang suo yuan

‘I hope that every participants who puts his or her heart and soul into the exam will get what they want, which is to obtain the teacher qualification certificate.’

教资人 *jiao zi ren* in example (17) refers to people who spare no effort to pass the teacher qualification exam. It goes the same for the buzzword 考研人 *kao yan ren*, to some extent, both of them promote a feeling of inspiration.

(c). Adjective Compound as the “AB ” Part

- (18). 你是一个没人疼爱的“可怜人”。

ni shi ge mei ren teng ai de ke lian ren

‘You are a pitiful person’.

As illustrated in (18), 可怜人 *ke lian ren* is used to describe people who look pitiful that needs to be helped or deployed by the users as a way to show self-soothing when they are trapped in a tough situation.

- (19). 下属们有时候会称他为“隐形人”。

xia shu men you shi hou hui cheng ta wei yin xing ren

‘Since he has a weak sense of existence, subordinates sometimes would ignore him’.

隐形人 *yin xing ren* in example (19) means a group of people who are not valued by others in life and have a weak sense of existence or individuals deliberately try to conceal themselves to lower the social attention.

- (20). 原来大家都是“真香人”，要的就是这种反差感。

yuan lai da jia dou shi zhen xiang ren, yao de jiu shi zhe zhong fan cha gan

‘It turns out that everyone does things that have previously said no, and what they want is this sense of contrast’.

真香人 *zhen xiang ren* as shown in example (20) is perceived as someone pretends to say or does something that is the opposite of what they really believe, which deviates from a rule called 真香定律 *zhen xiang ding lü* to describe

people who are hypocritical.

From the examples which have been just addressed, it can be found that the “AB Ren” construction has the completely independent constructional meaning, which lies in the fact that it is used to depict a specific group of people with certain characteristics and individuals who are obsessed with doing particular activities. A construction has its own independent meaning, distinct from the simple addition of its constituents. For example, 打工 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ on the internet is a general term for all those who are involved in labor or work and live on salaries, be they workers moving bricks on construction sites, white-collar workers sitting in the office, or middle-level leaders and entrepreneurs. They can all call themselves 打工 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ without limitations.

To sum up, the constructional feature of the “AB Ren” construction can be interpreted as a group of individuals engaged in occupations, devoted to particular activities and thus bounded with particular characteristics.

C. The Social Functions of the “AB Ren” Construction

(a). For Ridicule, Self-Mockery and Bitterness

It is not uncommon for the “AB Ren” construction to denote certain kinds of ridicule and mockery regarding users’ expressions and behaviors. For youngsters, it is an ideal way to relieve their emotional depression such as dissatisfaction, discomfort faced in life by way of mocking themselves, which serves as an innovative method to reconcile their working pressure in their personal lives. The very idea of the “AB Ren” construction is quite similar to Hemingway’s code hero, which refers to a group of people who believe that courage is “grace under pressure” and they have the ability to change a bad mood into a good one by self-mockery. For example, 阴阳人 *yin yang ren* ‘constant stinger’ demonstrates a person’s annoying way of utterance but makes a significant departure from the assumed literal meaning of an individual who possesses the characteristics of both man and woman, in a word, hermaphrodite. 阴阳人 *yin yang ren* ‘constant stinger’ shows the user’s satire, discontent, and denial of this particular kind of people. 工具人 *gong ju ren* ‘tool man’ normally used by the deployed one is an example showing the function of self-mockery. Despite the fact that this instance of the construction may seem to suggest that the user is unable to tolerate the constant demands of others without considering his or her own feelings, 工具人 *gong ju ren* ‘tool man’ is not a complaint of being required to do things but used as a demonstration of the user’s sense of humor. Another is shown in (21), which tends to present him or her as a big spender though he or she notices the tough situation facing ahead.

(21). 双十一刚走, 双十二又到了, 剁手人快被贫穷逼疯了, 但是看到好看的好吃的还是忍不住买买买。

shuang shi yi gang zou, shuang shi er you dao le, duo shou ren kuai bei pin qiong bi feng le, dan shi kan dao hao kan de hao chi de hai shi ren bu zhu mai mai mai

‘I splashed out during the double eleven shopping gala and now I live from hand to mouth. The beyond budgeting situation can’t stop me from buying some nice cloths and delicious food because the double twelve has come’.

Context like 打工 *da gong ren* 没有生活, 眼前的皆是苟且 *da gong ren mei you sheng huo, yan qian de jie shi gou qie* ‘the lives of wage earners are simply filled with pots and pans’ indicates workers are constantly bounded with hectic as well as torturous working day and almost have no time enjoying life.

(b). For Encouragement and Passion

Many instances of the construction containing a motivating effect are regarded as inspirations by modern-day people. 干饭人 *gan fan ren* ‘foodie’ may mislead people if they simply consider it in a literal way. This construction is not referring to a type of person who eats like a horse or has bad eating habit. Instead 干饭人 *gan fan ren* ‘foodie’ takes food as a carrier, dramatically expressing people’s love and passion for life. Besides, it corresponds with the traditional concept of “food being the first necessity of the people”. 打工 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ symbolizes all walks of life. The expression 打工 *da gong ren* 要加油 *yao jia you* ‘wage earner needs to add oil’ shows that no matter how much pressure the user has encountered, he or she would strive on and keep going. A sense of self-motivation and never giving up could be achieved in the process of using this construction.

(c). For Non-Offensive Social Distance Shortening

One obvious phenomenon where the “AB Ren” construction applies is that of the advertisements posted by some Weibo influencers and advertisers. Portraying products like massage chairs, foot baths, laptop holders as necessary prerequisites for making workers feel comfortable or relieving their pain as 打工 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’, 加班人 *jia ban ren* ‘people who have to work overtime’ might suffer from sore back or lack of sleep. This is exemplified in the expressions like 熬夜人必备 *ao ye ren bi bei* ‘necessities for people who stay up late’, 打工 *da gong ren* 好物 *hao wu* ‘useful things for wage earner’, 给打工 *gei da gong ren* 推荐一些营养饮料 *tui jian yi xie ying yang yin liao* ‘recommend some nutritious leverages to wage earners’ employed by the online sellers as a tool to influence and show sympathy for the targeted potential customers, and therefore increase the sales figure. Probably the most distinct context where the 打工 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ expression is constantly used is in some weather forecasts and official accounts. By way of illustration, a video entitled 咱们打工 *zan men da gong ren* 都要知道的事儿 *dou yao zhi dao de*

shi er ‘important points workers are required to know’ posted by Sichuan Firefighting shows several safety points that workers need to pay attention to. Moreover, the appearance of 打工人 *da gong ren* ‘wage earner’ is used as a self-mockery by all walks of life, thus making the division between mental and manual labor impossible in the emotional sense, and construing a group-based image which shortens people’s social distance in the competitive present world.

D. Cognitive Mechanisms of the “AB Ren” Construction

(a). Metaphorical Mechanism Behind the “AB Ren” Construction

According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 10). In addition, metaphor allowed for the use of source domain inference patterns to reason about the target domain” (p. 177). The metaphorical meaning behind this construction is deeply rooted in everyday physical experience; however, their use differs from that of similes. People are more inclined to use existing cognitive schemes and interactive modes to accept new cognitive experiences and interaction methods. It can be compared to a kind of resemblance by which the mechanism uses a concrete and known meaning to refer to the abstract content. A recent study found that the 工具人 *da gong ren* ‘tool man’ can be a vital demonstration of the metaphorical mechanics (Song & Zeng, 2021). Tools, which serve as the source domain, are inanimate things that are used by people. Certain people with the characteristics of “tools” serve as the target domain. The source domain is used to reason about the target domain. The target domain and the source domain are connected because of the similar meaning between them—a tool to use whenever people want. The target domain is processed in the neural maps until it is compatible with the conceptual meaning of the source domain. Then 工具人 *gong ju ren* ‘tool man’ means a type of people who is ruthlessly and constantly exploited by others. Another example is 做梦人 *zuo meng ren* ‘people who are always daydreaming’ which can also be analyzed in this way. The act of dreaming is very illusory and regarded as the source domain in this expression. The target domain is a certain group of people who are obsessed with dreaming something unrealistic. They are conflated and have common features like unrealistic thoughts.

(b). Metonymical Mechanism Behind the “AB Ren” Construction

“In a metonymy, there is only one domain: the immediate subject matter. There is only one mapping; typically the metonymic source maps to the metonymic target (the referent) so that one item in the domain can stand for the other” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 186). Metonymy is a universal cognitive and linguistic mechanism in human society, and it refers to the substitutable relationship between two items in similar or related cognitive domains accompanied by differences. The relationship between the source and the target meaning of metonymy is usually characterized as one of associations or contiguities. Furthermore, grounded in our experience, metonymic concepts allow us to conceptualize one thing using its correlation to another physical entity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Besides, we utilize metonymy because it is hard to contain all aspects of our intended meaning in the language we use. The metonymy, serving as the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity. “Ren” in Chinese has the underlying meaning of a group of people gathering together. When it is combined with the “AB” part, the whole structure contains a certain kind of meaning to show the features or conditions of a group of people. For example, an obvious use of metonymy is underlined in the expression 单车人 *dan che ren* ‘cyclists’, in which the word 单车 *dan che* ‘cycle’ means the shared bikes and it serves as the metonymic target. 单车人 *dan che ren* ‘cyclists’ can be seen as the metonymic source of the action of riding shared bikes. Individuals’ discourses using this construction indicate the functions of self-mockery, encouragement and social distance shortening.

V. CONCLUSION

As a response to the network buzzwords, this paper attends to the widespread “AB Ren” construction. By adopting Goldberg’s construction grammar as the theoretical framework while combining BCC and Weibo as sites for data collection, this study makes it possible for exploring the formal feature, constructional meaning, cognitive mechanisms and social functions behind “AB Ren” construction. This networked construction combines a changeable part ranging from a verb compound, noun compound and adjective compound with a fixed item. Drawing upon the existing social media context to look at discourses under which these units occurs offers key inspirations with which to address the constructional meaning of this construction. The “AB Ren” construction is characterized as individuals who are bounded to a particular kind of occupation, who are deeply in love with certain activities or who have particular mannerisms through long-standing involvements in various fields. The metaphorical and metonymical mechanisms behind this construction are perceived as methods for deriving new units. The social functions like self-mockery, encouragement and intimacy creation contribute to the spread of this “AB Ren” construction.

In spite of the fact that this paper provides a fairly comprehensive analysis of the “AB Ren” construction based on Goldberg’s construction grammar, it is not yet complete. There are still some limitations to it. For example, the amounts of corpus data from BCC (Beijing Language and Culture University Corpus), as well as the online buzzwords from the social media network Weibo which lack references and authority are limited. In addition, since the linguistic discourse is constantly changing, it is impossible to cover all new terms that appear. Due to the complex property of the Chinese

language, some nouns can also serve as adjectives in some instances. The fact that some nouns and adjectives are too vague to be distinguished makes it quite difficult to separate them.

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