

## Study on "ban-A-bu-B" Format

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**Abstract:** “ban-A-bu-B” format is a popular format in spoken expression in modern Chinese. Basing on the full analysis of the nature and characteristics of the variable part “A””B” and the invariant part of “ban” and “ bu “, this paper holds that the format is a low-level expression with a format meaning: 1. When the semantemes of A and B are opposite, the whole format emphasis on “ban-A”, which contains the expression of soft rejection and disgust;2. When the semantemes between A and B are similar, this format contains inappropriate and disagree expression to things or events, etc. This kind of format has a function of low-level negative evaluation and the function of high-level subjectivity.

**Keywords:** ban-A-bu-B; Format meaning; Pragmatic functions

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### 1 A, B in the Format

#### 1.1 Properties of A and B

After analysing and investigating the corpus, we find that A and B which are embedded in the form of “ban-A-bu-B” are adjectives, such as ban-soft-bu-hard, ban-yin-bu-yang, ban-dry-bu-wet, ban-cold-bu-hot, etc.

In addition, in the corpus, we also find there are verbs appearing as the constituent of A and B, such as “ban-dead-bu-alive”. The analysis of these corpus shows that

it can be used to describe not only the physical state of creature (such as people, animals and plants), but still the living conditions of people, as well as the operating conditions of institutions, industries and enterprises. Such as:

(1) If you can get the house and the field, hit her to “**ban-dead-bu-alive**”, if you can’t get the house and the field, you will kill Amei in Xu’s courtyard. (Lu Wenfu, “renzhiwo”)

(2) The trees were planted, but after a period, we have not taken care of these trees with cultivating, irrigating and pest-controlling, so they’re in a **ban-dead-bu-alive** situation. (People’s Daily 1994)

(3) These days, he is either as a computer hacker to rob the bank, or still, in the daytime as an unskilled laborer in “**ban-dead-bu-alive**”, and till the night, he’ll keep sinking into the Internet. (Wei Hui, “Shanghai Baby”)

(4) Of course, they should not copy the experience of Ruzhou stubbornly, and they should keep on the reformation according to their own conditions, which can let those **ban-dead-bu-alive** industries and almost bankrupt enterprises to revive. (People’s Daily 1994)

#### 1.2 Semantic characteristics of A and B in the format

##### 1.2.1 A, B are adjectives with opposite meanings

(5) When walking to the platform facing to the students, he was totally different from the image of Shen Congwen which they had imagined. He was dressed in a **ban-new-bu-old** blue gown with a thin body, and he was so frail like a woman. A pair of black bright eyes...

(ling yu, Shen Congwen's quest for the phoenix)

(6) Hungrily, following the sweet smell of melon to a melon garden on the beach, he stole a **ban-cooked-bu-raw** melon, and then walked along the path to the bank of the river. (white deer plain by Chen Zhongshi)

(7) After a **ban-starved-bu-full** and communist-style "big pot meal", the whole company totally ran out of the food and water. (Li Cunbao, the wreath under the mountain)

Sometimes the opposite meanings of A and B are temporary, as the following examples (8) ~ (11). In some cases, the opposites meaning of A and B are in a kind of diversity, as the following example (12). Meanwhile there are more than one opposite A to the same B. Such as the following example (13).

Xiao Huangmi who does not know the man's age guess that he is a **ban-old-bu-fashion** man. (Tie Ning, the story of Xiao Huangmi, part 1)

His early albums didn't earn much reputation, and his status of music was only **ban-black-bu-red**. (People's Daily, 1993)

He stood on the front of the bed with his head down, and slowly dumped his pocket, rolling some **ban-red-bu-green** apricots and some small peaches. (song of youth by Yang Mo)

He was the most out-going and energetic person who likes to talk with the folks, but now he was stuck in the **ban-ambiguous-bu-clear** and lonely world, who didn't go out and only has mourned the dead wife for 27 years. (Readers (bound edition))

a. In the sky, there were gray floating clouds, with **ban-bright-bu-dim** stars. Behind the clouds, on the dark blue "board" between gaps of the clouds, there were beams of faint light. (the red sun by Wu Qiang)

b. On the back of him, we could see our **ban-lit-bu-gloom** bonfires occupying a wide space in the mist. He was suck in the heavy mist. (translated from war and peace)

(13) a. The weather at past was like now---**ban-cold-bu-hot**. At that time, the love sickness bird on the top of the banyan tree sang previously still are similar to now.

b. Coffee is always **ban-cold-bu-hot**, the toilet paper is always black, and the coin-operated phone microphones are always smelly. (Tie Ning, "The Big Bath Girl").

### 1.2.2 A, B are adjectives with similar meanings

(14) He seems to be an idiocy and **ban-stupid-bu-silly**. (translation: Death of A Cleaning Woman)

(15) Such a **ban-stupid-bu-silly** General Namu,

how to become the "god of war"? Not because of his success, but because both of his sons had died at Lushun. Supposedly is the Namu at that time is a general, leave a son in the side, others can not say what is not to, but Namu still sent two sons into the line of fire. After the war reward for meritorious deeds, to the Namu sealed a title. (sina reading)

(16) It was dark, a street lamp far away, **ban-lit-bu-bright**, dimly shining. (Liang Bin's Red Flag Spectrum)

(17) Hot soup struggled in the cold wind, sent to the stomach, good uncomfortable **ban-cold-bu-cool**. (Liang Fengyi, "Snow")

The adjectives with opposite meanings prefer appearing in "ban-A-bu-B" format, while the adjectives with similar meanings are not like that. The main reason is that "ban-A-bu-A" format is also used generally in Chinese. If A and B embedded in "ban-A-bu-B" format are adjectives with similar meanings, they are roughly equivalent to the format of "ban-A-bu-A".

There is another case: A and B are similar in meaning as well as the composition of A and B can make a word.

[1] A and B which are in the word are separated and then enter into the format. This case is rarely shown in the corpus.

(18) They seized the opportunity, accepted it in silence, and, with **ban-know-bu-realize**, made it happen. (Translation "Genius")

(19) The **ban-willing-bu-readily** official said, "We can't do that." (Translated works", "Liberated through Knowledge")

(20) A few pairs of worn-out socks, a few a-b-c books, and a draft of the task force's land-reform plan, written in **ban-scatter-bu-spilling**, with a few ban-length pencils left behind, as well as bandages, rags, and cotton from the sword... (Qu Bo, snowy forest)

## 2 "ban" and "bu" in the format

### 2.1 The function of "ban"

The "ban" in the format gives modifies and qualifies to the A, partly affirms the nature and state of A, and expresses the characteristics of A's quantity. We believe that "ban" plays a role of partial affirmation in the format.

### 2.2 The role of "bu"

When "bu" is used alone, it can be used in front of an adjective to change the meaning of the adjective into opposite, such as: " bu-dirty, bu-beautiful, bu-hungry, bu-familiar", etc. The negation of negative adverb

"bu" to the adjective belongs to differential negation, which means that the degree of negation is less than "full quantity".<sup>[2]</sup>Let's take "bu-good" as an example the "good" is the opposite of "bad", the degree of "bu-good" is far less than the degree of "bad", so we believe that the "bu-X" degree of order of magnitude less than "X's antonyms," meanwhile less than or no more than "X's antonyms" original meaning, which means it doesn't reach the degree of opposite of X.

The "bu" in the format forms A establishes the relationship between "bu-B"(the opposite of B) and "A" by negating B:

(I)When A and B are opposite words, the magnitude of "bu-B" is less than the magnitude of "A". Such as "ban-yin-bu-yang", since yin and yang are a pair of opposite words, we think the degree of "bu-yang" is less than "Yin". In this case, we believe that besides having a delimiting function in the format, "bu" reduce the qualifier of "B" in addition to its negative function.

(II)When A and B are similar words, we regard C as the opposite word of A and B. the magnitude of "bu-B" is less than the magnitude of "C". Cold and hot are a pair of synonyms. If "ban-cold" means "not cool" and "hot" is their common antonym, "bu-cool" degree of magnitude is less than "hot" degree of magnitude.<sup>[3]</sup>In our view, the "bu" in this case has only a negative effect in the form and has no delimiting effect.

### 3 The formal meaning of "ban-A-bu-B"

#### 3.1 A, B are the formal meanings of opposite words

When A and B are opposite words, A and B are two opposite and insoluble properties and states. "ban-A" is a partial affirmation of A, which is less than the full quantity of "A" in terms of magnitude expression. Discussed above, we only discuss the meaning of the entire format in scope "A", so the semantic focus of the entire format is "ban-A". The magnitude of "no B" is less than the full magnitude of "A". "bu-B" plays a further role in supplementing and illustrating "ban-A". The two parts of the format "ban-A" and "bu-B" both indicate that the magnitude is less than the full magnitude of "A", so we believe that "ban-A-bu-B" is a low-level expression with the semantic center of gravity at "ban-A", which has a meaning of mild disgust. Such as:

(21)As you are so incapable, **ban-dead-bu-alive**, and want to do things, that is called the old monk to see the

dowry, the next life see it! (Lao she, "The life of Zhao zi")

"bu-alive" is a small degree of magnitude than "dead", so it means the state of no death, is "live", because "bu" put "live" outside the boundary, and the semantic center of gravity of the format in "ban-dead", then "ban-dead" on the image of the kind closer to the "dead" state of life, has the colour of disgust, abandon.

#### 3.2 In the case of A and B as synonyms, the format meaning of "ban-A-bu-B"

When A and B are similar words, A and B are two similar properties and states. "ban" is still a partial affirmation of "A", while "bu" is a negation of "B with similar properties and states of A". The two seemingly contradictory parts are combined together, and we use "C" to reveal its internal connection. If we regard C as the opposite word of A and B, then A-C and B-C are two pairs of antonyms, so "ban-A" = "ban-C". "ban-A" partly confirms the nature and state of A, but also partly confirms the nature and state of C. We analysis in front of the degree of magnitude "B" < "C" in the full quantity of degree, so we think that "ban-A-bu-B" is a low level expression, expressed between A, C, of course, also can say in a fuzzy state between B and C. Using a seemingly contradictory structure express an identity, suitable condition. For example, the above examples (14) ~ (17).

### 4 Pragmatic features of "ban-A-bu-B"

#### 4.1 Function of low-level negative evaluation

"ban-A-bu-B" is also a fuzzy expression of low-level, indicating a low degree of magnitude. What the format expresses is always a vague state between A and B, which contains certain subjective evaluation of the speaker. Affected by the negative adverb "bu", the whole format expresses disgust, with the speaker's dissatisfied and disapproving attitude, and has the function of negative evaluation. Such as:

(22)In the **ban-bright-bu-dark** waiting room, men and women, old and young, of all kinds, sat a strange, frightening impression. (translated work "the shackles of human nature")

(23)Researchers often criticize the **ban-novel-bu-outdated** ethics and moral values of the bat writers. (newspaper "reading")

(24) Well, all year round we always eat **ban-cooked-bu-raw** Wowo tou(a kind of main food), drink bitter

well water, asked him to improve the food, he even ignore. (Lao she"Spring flowers and autumn fruits")

While developing traditional Myanmar medicine, the institute also encourages the integration of traditional Chinese medicine, Indian medicine and western medicine with traditional Burmese medical knowledge and methods.

On this basis, traditional Chinese medicine should be integrated with traditional Myanmar medicine, learn from each other, be open and inclusive, and bring its characteristics into play for the benefit of more Myanmar people.

## 4.2 Features that highlight subjectivity

In our opinion,"ban-A-bu-B", which has the function of negative evaluation, has the strong subjectivity of the speaker and mostly means the speaker's dissatisfaction and disgust.<sup>[4]</sup> We use "ban-A and ban-B" format and replace it with words with similar meanings of "ban-A and ban-B" format in examples (22), (23) and (24) respectively for comparison:

(22') a. In the **ban-bright-ban-dark** waiting room, men and women, old and young, of all kinds, sat a strange, frightening impression. (translated work "the shackles of human nature")

b. In the **dim** waiting room, men and women, old and young, of all kinds, sat a strange, frightening impression. (translated work "the shackles of human nature")

(23') a. Researchers often criticize the **ban-modern-ban-outmoded** ethics and moral values of the bat writers. (newspaper "reading")

b. Researchers often criticize the decayed ethics and moral values of the bat writers. (newspaper "reading")

(24') a. Well, all year round we always eat **ban-cooked-ban-raw** Wowo tou(a kind of main food), drink bitter well water, asked him to improve the food, he even ignore. (Lao she"Spring flowers and autumn fruits")

b. Well, all year round we always eat the raw Wowo tou(a kind of main food), drink bitter well water,

asked him to improve the food, he even ignore. (Lao she"Spring flowers and autumn fruits")

Through substitution, we found that the substitution words "ban-bright-ban-dark" and "dim" in example (22') had more objective descriptions of the components of "waiting room" than "ban-bright-bu-dark", which had certain objectivity. There was no obvious dissatisfaction of the speaker, while "ban-bright-bu-dark" had obvious dissatisfaction of the speaker. The substitutions "ban-modern-ban-outmoded" and "outdated" in example (23') are not as significant as the subjective negative expressions of "ban-modern-ban-outmoded", which are mostly objective descriptions. The substitutions "ban-cooked-ban-raw" and "raw" in example(24') are also objective explanations of the degree of raw and cooked of "Wowo tou", which do not have much evaluation significance.

## 5 Conclusion

The "low-level negative evaluation function" and "subjective highlights function" of the "ban-A-bu-B" format make it take an important role in the Chinese expression system. When people use this format, they often express mild dislike, dissatisfaction, or a belief that a situation is inappropriate. People choose this format to express such inappropriateness and dissatisfaction rather than other forms, because the "vague state" presented by this format makes it have euphemistic expression effect, which conforms to the politeness principle and helps to maintain the self-image in communicative expression.

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