

The semantic function and spatial metonymy of the "把NP—V" construction in early modern Chinese

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Abstract. Based on language materials from early modern Chinese literature such as "*Sanyan Erpai*", this study conducts a systematic investigation of the "Ba NP Yi V" ("把 NP—V") structure in early modern Chinese. Focusing on multiple dimensions of the verb's spatial features, the study systematically reveals the spatial nature of the construction, clarifying that spatiality, rather than mere temporality, constitutes the core to understanding its function. Furthermore, the research explores the metonymic extension of the structure from physical space to psychological space, offering a new perspective for understanding the cognitive mechanisms of spatial expression in Chinese.

Keywords: 把NP—V, spatial metonymy, spatial adaptability, *Sanyan Erpai*, early modern Chinese

1. Introduction

As a highly representative sentence pattern in Chinese, the Ba-construction exhibits diverse forms and has been extensively studied, resulting in a substantial body of academic literature. The "Ba NP Yi V" ("把NP—V") construction, a subtype of the Ba-construction, gradually emerged and developed in early modern Chinese, constituting a significant component within the disposal construction system of that era. The distinctive features that set "把NP—V" apart from the general Ba-construction have consistently been a focal point of scholarly attention. Expressions exhibiting the initial structural feature of "把NP—V" pattern first appeared during the Northern Song Dynasty.

- (1) 杨文公一日置酒,作绝句招之,末云:"好把长鞭便一挥"(北宋\笔记\范镇 东斋记事[1]).
- (2) 子由解意,把笔管一卓,而以口吹之(北宋\笔记\蔡绦 铁围山丛谈[2]).
- (3) 此人凛然强起,把剑一挥,应手落壁,磕然有声,后寂无音响(北宋\话本\李昉 太平广记[3]).

During the Northern Song Dynasty, expressions such as "好把长鞭便一挥", "把笔管一卓", and "把剑一挥" already exhibited a formal structure essentially identical to the later "把NP—V" construction. In the textual corpus from this period, however, a relatively limited number of such instances can be identified. This era marks the incipient or embryonic stage of the "把NP—V" structure. While many of its semantic and grammatical features were not yet prominent or fully developed, some had begun to emerge preliminarily. Notably, the construction was already capable of expressing, in a preliminary manner, the semantic notion of momentary or instantaneous action.

The "把NP—V" construction underwent rapid development during the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, appearing extensively in various texts, particularly in secular novels of the time, and exhibited distinct period characteristics as well as unique grammatical features. This study primarily selects textual examples from the "三言二拍". The corpus drawn from these works is substantial and diverse in type, making it particularly suitable for highlighting the features of the "把NP—V" structure during the Ming and Qing periods. Unless otherwise specified, the editions of the *Three Collections of Short Stories and Two Collections of Amazing Tales* and other cited texts used in this study are as follows, and will not be individually noted thereafter.

Previously, Jiang Shaoyu [4] classified the Ba-construction in early modern Chinese and examined the functions of each category individually. Lü Wenhua [5] approached the classification of the Ba-construction from a semantic perspective. Scholar Shen Jiaxuan [6] systematically argued that the grammatical meaning of the Ba-construction lies in expressing "subjective disposal", with its subjectivity manifested in the speaker's affect, perspective, and cognition, among other aspects. Regarding the specific "把NP—V" construction, scholar Xu Feng [7] conducted a systematic analysis of its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic functions. He pointed out that this construction imposes a strict requirement on monosyllabic action verbs and mandates the connection to a subsequent clause. Compared to other forms of "—V" sentences, the "把NP—V" construction emphasizes the meaning of subjective disposal, highlighting the agent's specific act of disposal towards an object.

Yang Qian [8] examines the evolution of the "把NP—V" construction from early modern Chinese to contemporary Chinese from a diachronic perspective. She noted that this construction does not rely on a subsequent clause to convey complete meaning; instead, it conveys a bounded temporal concept, whose specific duration and dynamic aspect depend on the speaker's psychological expectation and attitude toward the action. Yang Qian observes in her research that, in addition to its subjectivization, the "把NP—V" construction has also undergone intersubjectivization. In her latest study, through statistical and illocutionary act analysis of the construction as it appears in dialogic and narrative texts, Yang [9] found that it is predominantly employed for assertive and expressive acts. In the former, speakers use this construction to enhance rhetorical force, increase rhythmicity and dynamism, express their own perspective, and convey intersubjective temporality; in the latter, speakers consciously employ it to create contrasts and achieve antithetical effects.

While existing studies have explored the Ba-construction and the "把NP—V" construction from multiple perspectives, discussions regarding the verb in this structure have largely been limited to aspects such as monosyllabic form and instantaneousness. However, temporality and spatiality are inseparable components. Current research has yet to address the spatial characteristics of verbs in this construction. Evidence from early modern Chinese texts such as *Sanyan Erpai* suggests that verbs in the "把NP—V" construction often carry rich spatial information. These spatial elements play a crucial role in both the interpretation and expressive effect of the construction, yet their systematic elucidation remains absent in existing scholarship.

2. Semantic features and spatiality of the "把NP—V" construction

Space is a fundamental category in human cognition and a core element of linguistic expression. The "把NP—V" construction exhibits distinctive semantic characteristics in early modern Chinese, with its essence lying in expressing the spatial disposition of an object through an instantaneous action. Within this construction, the verb encompasses not only the actual action but also carries rich spatial information, including the action's direction, path, and boundaries. For instance:

(4) 到溪边,小童就驴背上把韦义方一推,头掉脚掀,跌将下去(明小说《冯梦龙喻世明言》).

(5) 至四五句, 冉贵在傍斟酒, 把酒盏望下一掷, 众人一齐动手, 捉了庙官 (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言).

The verbs "推" and "掷" both entail explicit directional and displacement properties. This spatial feature plays a crucial role in understanding the overall function and expressive effect of the construction.

2.1. The aspectual function of "yi" and spatial change

In the "把NP—V" construction, the semantics of "yi" (一) has undergone grammaticalization, shifting from denoting concrete verbal momentum to functioning as an aspectual marker. Its core function is to express the instantaneity and abruptness of spatial events. From a diachronic perspective, the trajectory of semantic change in "yi" clearly reflects its evolution from a specific momentum indicator to an abstract grammatical marker. In the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus, "yi" still retains some of its literal, referential meaning, as illustrated in examples such as:

(6) 公子道: "不妨, 不妨!" 说罢, 把马尾一拍, 喝声: "快走!" (明\小说\冯梦龙 警世通言 [10]).

In the phrase "把马尾一拍", it can be understood as patting the horse's tail one time, where the characteristic of verbal momentum is relatively prominent.

In *Sanyan Erpai*, the literal and grammaticalized uses of "yi" coexist: it can denote specific verbal momentum while also conveying temporal brevity and action swiftness. During the Ming and Qing periods, as the language gradually evolved, "yi" eventually completed its grammaticalization. It became capable of construing originally time-consuming actions as spatial changes based on the speaker's subjective intent, reflecting a process of subjectivization.

In terms of the spatial dimension, the aspectual function of "yi" is concretely manifested in the following three aspects:

2.1.1. Instantaneous activation of spatial state

"Yi" imparts an abrupt inceptive quality to the action performed on the NP, emphasizing that the spatial state of the NP is activated and undergoes a transformation instantaneously. Within the brief temporal span represented by "yi," the change in the NP's spatial state progresses from initiation to completion. Beyond its temporal implication, "yi" also inherently signifies the transformation of spatial state, serving as a marker for this spatial transition.

2.1.2. Abrupt change in spatial relation

The "把NP—V" construction uses "yi" to highlight a sudden alteration in the NP's spatial relation, thereby creating a strong visual impact for reader. The brief duration represented by "yi" achieves an effect of abruptness in the change of the NP's spatial relation. The impact on the reader lies not only in the perception of time but also in the transformation of space, forming a vivid and dynamic visual scene through intense spatial shifts.

2.1.3. Immediate triggering of spatial trajectory

"Yi" marks the instantaneous initiation and completion of the NP's displacement path within a specific space. What "yi" encompasses is the specific time interval during which the NP initiates its spatial trajectory. Within the momentary time frame represented by "yi", the NP's action progresses from start to finish, and the path of displacement associated with the action likewise runs its course from beginning to end.

In the corpus, the aspectual function of "yi" is specifically reflected as follows:

(7) 只见先生把腰一伸, 睁开双眼, 说道: "正睡得快活, 何人搅醒我来?" (明\小说\冯梦龙 喻世明言 [11]).

(8) 白娘子见了和尚, 摇开船, 和青青把船一翻, 两个都翻下水底去了 (明\小说\冯梦龙 警世通言).

(9) 至四五句, 冉贵在傍斟酒, 把酒盏望下一掷, 众人一齐动手, 捉了庙官 (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言 [12]).

In example (7), the action of "伸" is not a slow process of bodily bending and extending, but rather a transformation of action and bodily posture completed instantaneously. This, in turn, immediately triggers the expansion and alteration of the character's spatial environment. In example (8), the action of "翻" constitutes an instantaneous act of disposal performed by Madame White and Xiaoqing upon the boat. This action enables the reorganization of the space occupied by the boat by Madame White and Xiaoqing to be completed in an instant, producing an effect of sudden alteration in spatial configuration. In example (9), "把酒盏望下一掷", the instantaneous nature of the "掷" action directly triggers the transfer of the wine cup's spatial position from above to below. The preceding and following actions are tightly connected temporally and progress coherently in space. These examples distinctly illustrate the aspectual characteristics of "yi" within the construction.

2.2. Semantic roles of NP and spatial entity

The noun phrase in the "把NP—V" formation plays a crucial role in spatial expression, with its semantic features directly shaping the construction of spatial scenarios. Based on a preliminary examination of the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus, the NP in this structure exhibits typical spatial entity properties and forms a systematic framework of semantic roles.

Body-part NPs constitute the most central category of nouns in this construction, appearing with exceptionally high frequency in the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus. These NPs, such as 手(shou, 'hand'), 舌(she, 'tongue'), 腰(yao, 'waist'), 头(tou, 'head'), 脸(lian, 'face'), 眼(yan, 'eye'), and 口(kou, 'mouth'), possess unique spatial properties. On one hand, they serve as the direct carriers of action and maintain an inseparable possessive relationship with the agent. For instance, in example (7) "把腰一伸", "腰" is both the recipient of the action and an integral part of the agent's body. On the other hand, they often function as the reference origin for spatial displacement, representing changes in overall spatial relations through alterations in their own positions. This metonymic mechanism, where a part stands for the whole, grants body-part NPs a uniquely significant role in the spatial expression of this construction.

Instrumental NPs represent another crucial category of spatial entities, including concrete objects such as 剑(jian 'sword'), 刀(dao 'knife'), 钥匙(yao shi 'key'), 扇(shan 'fan'), and 镜子(jing zi 'mirror'). Unlike body-part NPs, instrumental NPs possess a relatively independent spatial existence and well-defined functional purposes. In example (3) "把剑一挥", "剑" is not only the object of the action but also an extension medium of the agent in space. The physical properties represented by the "剑" (e.g., length, hardness) influence the effect and scope of the spatial action. This category of NPs reflects the cognitive trait of tools serving as extensions of the agent's personal space. Through the use of instrumental NPs, the sphere of influence of the agent's spatial action is expanded.

With the development of this construction, Abstract NPs have gradually been incorporated, a phenomenon that demonstrates the productivity of the grammatical structure. These NPs acquire spatial attributes via metonymic based on spatial contiguity, forming a systematic mapping from concrete to abstract space. For example:

(10) 辨悟道: "老文肯把得此纸的根由一说, 愚师徒也剖心相告" (明\小说\凌濛初 二刻拍案惊奇 [13]).

In example (10) "把得此纸的根由一说", "根由" is metaphorically extended from a specific linguistic expression in physical space to represent abstract information exchanged in communicative space. This mechanism of metonymic extension not only enriches expressive capacity but also reveals that humans comprehend the universal regularities underlying abstract concepts through spatial cognition.

Regarding the composition and spatial substantiality of the noun phrase NP, most NPs in this construction are bare nouns. In the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus, this manifests as a prevalence of body-part NPs and instrumental NPs. These bare NPs do not denote indefinite reference; rather, within specific contexts, they represent

particular, spatially substantial entities that are clearly identifiable and understood by both speaker and listener. For instance:

(11) 秦重把头一缩, 舌头一伸, 道: "恁的好卖弄! 不敢动问, 你家花魁娘子一夜歇钱要几千两?" (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言).

In example (11), "头" in the phrase "把头一缩" refers to a specific body part of the agent that is actively performing the action within the current context. This definiteness allows the noun phrase NP to serve as a stable and unambiguous carrier of the agent's spatial action, thereby providing an anchor for the construction of the spatial scenario shared by both the speaker and the listener.

2.3. The integration of adverbial elements and the elaboration of spatial trajectory

The integration of adverbial elements and the elaboration of spatial trajectory constitute a significant feature of the "把NP—V" construction. Although the core structure is "把NP—V", adverbial elements indicating direction or location (such as "望下", "对着街上") are frequently inserted into the construction. According to statistics, within the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus, there are a total of 18 instances containing such inserted adverbial elements. Among these, three occurrences denote the target of the action, three denote spatial direction, and twelve denote the spatial trajectory of the action.

Adverbial elements expressing the target of the action primarily point to relevant persons in the immediate context. Through the verb in the "把NP—V" construction, the agent interacts or communicates with these individuals, as seen in examples like "向儿子" and "向樵夫". These essentially specify the orientation and transmission path of the action within physical space. Adverbial elements expressing spatial direction in the corpus are mainly represented by directional indicators for actions, such as "上下" and "望下". Adverbial elements expressing the spatial trajectory of the action primarily supplement information regarding the starting point, endpoint, or route traversed by the patient after the action is initiated, as seen in examples like "向桌上", "劈头", "向墙外", and "空中".

These adverbial elements serve to elaborate on the trajectory and direction of the agent's spatial action, rendering originally potentially vague spatial displacement more precise. Functioning as focal points for new information, they compensate for the informational insufficiency of bare noun NPs. Together, they constitute a complete spatial displacement event: the NP acts as the displaced object, the V indicates the manner of displacement, and the directional adverbial supplements the specific displacement path of the action.

3. An examination of the spatial adaptability of verbs in the "把NP—V" construction

Previous sections have discussed the spatial characteristics inherent in the NP, "yi", and adverbial elements within the "把NP—V" construction. However, the most fundamental spatial properties of this structure are carried by the verb, which bears the transformation and extension of space. Scholar Chu Zexiang [14] noted that while the primary characteristic of a verb is its temporal nature, an action also necessarily occupies space. Although space is not the main feature of an action, this does not imply a loose relationship between action and space. Prior research on "把NP—V" has predominantly focused on its temporal instantaneity. However, time cannot exist independently of space. Studying the spatial properties of verbs in the "把NP—V" construction serves, to some extent, to complement research on verbal characteristics. In investigating the spatiality of verbs in "把NP—V", the most crucial task is to examine and analyze the different types of verbs that appear in this structure.

3.1. Verb classification and spatial characteristics

According to statistical analysis, the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus contains a total of 105 instances of the "把NP—V" construction. This includes 15 instances from *Stories to Enlighten the World*, 11 from *Stories to Caution the World*, 38 from *Stories to Awaken the World*, 24 from *First Collection of Amazing Tales*, and 17 from *Second Collection of Amazing Tales*. Based on the frequency of occurrence in the corpus, the verbs are listed in descending order as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Frequency of verbs in the "把NP—V" construction

Verb Frequency	Example Words
Occurrences: 6	推
Occurrences: 5	伸, 指, 照
Occurrences: 4	摸, 看
Occurrences: 3	拱, 努 (弩)
Occurrences: 2	招, 拍, 轮, 缩, 灌, 相, 撒, 算, 简, 撩, 抖 (斗), 撇
Occurrences: 1	瞅, 扯, 扑, 叙, 拂, 勒, 纽, 喝, 歪, 翻, 捉, 滚, 抹, 磕, 揪, 捻, 揖, 揉, 老, 认, 动, 狗, 划, 划, 掀, 颠, 绊, 擦, 挥, 敲, 说, 点, 气, 啐, 挣, 节, 味, 观, 响, 合, 摆, 卷, 拽, 丢, 淋, 掷, 张, 觑

To classify the above verbs, we have chosen to categorize them based on their differing degrees of spatial adaptability. Scholar Shen Yang [15] argues that the displacement characteristics of predicate verbs in the "V+zai/dao + L" structure can effectively reflect meanings such as direction and existence denoted by the verbs. This study draws upon the classification method from Chu Zexiang's examination of verbal spatial adaptability, selecting "zai + L + VP", "V + L + (le)", and "V + zai/dao + L" as diagnostic frames for assessing a verb's spatial adaptability. Furthermore, the spatial range denoted by L is divided into the following four categories:

Class A Space: The spatial range of Class A is relatively small compared to other classes, making it difficult to accommodate or support the entire human body performing actions within it. L typically takes the form of a locative phrase, where the noun constituting the phrase refers to an entity physically smaller than the human body or to a part of the human body, such as 脸上, 手里, 瓶里, 桌上, etc.

Class B Space: The spatial range of Class B is larger, usually capable of accommodating multiple human bodies performing actions within it. L consists partly of locative phrases and partly of place words denoting buildings or locations, such as 家里, 酒店里, 殿里 街上, etc. Class B space is larger than the human body.

Class C Space: The spatial range of Class C is very extensive, far exceeding the size of the human body, and can accommodate large numbers of people performing actions within it. L comprises place words denoting geographical names or locative phrases formed from such names, such as 河里, 水中, 山上, 湖中, etc.

Class D Space: Class D space lacks the quantifiable characteristics of physical space; it is fundamentally virtual in nature, primarily serving as a carrier for abstract concepts such as emotion, thought, and communication, and cannot be measured by physical dimensions. Its capacity far exceeds that required for the virtual entities like emotions conveyed in the context. L represents virtual spaces related to psychology,

thought, communicative interaction, etc., generally used to convey emotions, virtual events, etc., such as 心上, 肚中, etc.

Based on these four classes of space (A, B, C, D), we proceed to classify the verbs according to their differing degrees of spatial adaptability.

Table 2. Classification of verbs based on spatial adaptability

Verb Spatial Adaptability	Example Words
Exclusively Adaptable to Class A Space	缩, 揪, 颠, 响, 抖
Exclusively Adaptable to Class B Space	伸, 撩, 扑, 瞅, 捉, 歪, 揉, 揖, 绊, 挥, 气, 挣, 合, 相, 扑, 拽, 努
Exclusively Adaptable to Class C Space	撒, 划
Adaptable to Class A and B Spaces	摸, 拍, 轮, 拂, 抹, 磕, 认, 掀, 说, 点, 啐, 张, 觑
Adaptable to Class A and C Spaces	勒, 捻, 擦, 淋
Adaptable to Class B and C Spaces	翻, 动, 掷, 推, 指, 照, 看, 拱, 灌, 撇
Adaptable to Class A, B and C Spaces	滚, 敲, 扭, 观, 摆, 丢, 卷, 招, 扯, 筒, 喝
Adaptable to Class A, B and D Spaces	算, 叙

Based on the varying types of spatial adaptability among verbs (Table 2), we can classify the verbs in this construction into the categories above. It can be observed that while the spatial adaptability of verbs capable of entering this construction varies, they generally exhibit a strong capacity for spatial adaptation.

Within the classification of spatial adaptability outlined above, we can identify a feature distinct from contemporary Mandarin: in the early modern Chinese corpus, there exist verbs that are exclusively adaptable to Class A space. This is closely related to the expression conveyed by the "把 NP—V" construction. A significant portion of the NPs disposed of by V in this structure are body parts of characters. The existence of actions targeting body parts leads to the inclusion of numerous verbs that govern such parts within this construction. These verbs also demonstrate considerable spatial adaptability. The actions denoted by this type of V illustrate the manner in which the agent controls the body part and, to some extent, reflect the mode and trajectory of the body part's movement in space. For example:

(12) 把腿一缩, 一只履鞋, 早脱掉了, 那里还有工夫敢来拾取? (明\小说\凌濛初 初刻拍案惊奇 [16]).

(13) 赵完听得, 回头看了一看, 把眼向儿子一颠, 赵寿会意, 急赶近前, 照顶门一棒槌打倒, 脑浆鲜血一齐喷出 (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言).

(14) 那妖狐索性把身一抖, 卸下衣服, 见出本相, 向门外乱跑, 风团也似去了 (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言).

Regarding the performance of verbs that are exclusively adaptable to Class A space within this construction, a contextual analysis reveals that these verbs consistently depict the spatial trajectory of the action in context. They indicate the agent's reassertion of spatial control over a body part, a process often accompanied by a change in the body part's form. In example (11), the action of "缩" represents the leg transitioning from an extended to a contracted state. In example (12), the action of "颠" reflects the rolling of the eyeball and the contraction of eye muscles. In example (13), the action of "抖" signifies the transformation of the fox demon from a human form to that of a fox.

There is a higher number of verbs that are only adaptable to Class B space. Verbs in this category enter the construction and co-occur not only with body-part NPs but also frequently with instrumental NPs. Within Class B space, due to its expanded spatial scope compared to Class A, the agent possesses greater room to

perform actions, enabling them to manipulate relevant tools. This is precisely why instrumental NPs are compatible with this type of verb.

Verbs exclusively adaptable to Class C space occur with relatively low frequency in the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus. As most dialogues in the corpus take place during interpersonal communication, the spatial scope reflected by verbs is largely confined to the immediate setting of the interacting characters.

Overall, verbs demonstrate the strongest adaptability to Class B space, while their adaptability to Class C and D spaces is comparatively weaker. Although verbs adaptable to Class D space are scarce, due to the significant differences in nature and scope between Class D space and the first three classes, we believe that verbs capable of adapting to this space possess considerable research value.

(15) 酒家把帐一算, 说: "还该二百" (明\小说\冯梦龙 *醒世恒言*).

(16) 在那狄员外的娘子肚中算计: "他若肯在这里住下, 我就把陈儿与他做了女婿" (明\小说\西周生 *醒世姻缘传* [17]).

(17) 吃过十数杯, 二人情兴如火, 免不得再把旧情一叙 (明\小说\冯梦龙 *喻世明言*).

Although in example (15), the meaning of 算 is "calculate", instances applicable to Class D space had already emerged in the Ming dynasty corpus. In example (16), suàn means "scheme" or "plan". Here, its spatial scope is "娘子的肚中". However, "肚中" here does not refer to the physical interior of the belly but rather denotes the wife's psychological space, where thoughts and calculations exist within her mental realm. This also indicates, to some extent, the emergence of 算—a verb capable of adapting to Class D space—within this construction.

Another verb appearing in the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus that can adapt to Class D space is 叙. In example (17), the object of narration is "旧情". Jiùqíng is not a tangible object existing in the physical world but rather a virtual event conveyed through discourse, which similarly demonstrates 叙's adaptability to the psychological space of Class D. In this process of adapting to Class D space, 叙 constructs the virtual object "旧情" as a virtual discursive event that can be transmitted between interlocutors. The "transmission" here is not physical but involves the construction and deconstruction of the virtual event at the psychological level by both parties. During this communicative process, the interaction between the interlocutors transforms emotional exchange within the psychological space into physically present discourse, thereby transmitting the memories and emotions associated with "旧情" at the psychological level through the narration of events.

Verbs capable of entering Class D space have significantly expanded the spatial applicability of the "把NP—V" construction. As the structure gradually developed, dynamic adjectives also began to enter it and proved better suited to expressing and conveying meanings within Class D space. Based on this, our understanding of the development of verb spatiality in "把NP—V" has deepened. Class D space also represents a unique feature of this construction within the broader Ba-construction system. Verbs operating at this level are particularly worthy of focused attention and comparative study.

3.2. Extension from physical to psychological space

Among the spatial types discussed above, the most distinctive and noteworthy are the verbs and dynamic adjectives capable of entering the virtual, psychological Class D space. The preceding section has outlined the progressive relationship between verbs and dynamic adjectives that adapt to Class D space. From this, we can understand that the spatiality of verbs in the "把NP—V" construction is not confined to descriptions within the singular dimension of physical space. Rather, through metonymic mechanisms, it extends into the realms of physiological and psychological space, forming a continuum of transformation: physical space → physiological space → psychological space. This extension exhibits a systematic semantic evolution in early

modern Chinese. Within this process, the NPs capable of entering this construction also follow certain patterns.

The human face and its various organs serve as the most prominent and direct external carriers of emotion and are also the critical juncture where physical, physiological, and psychological spaces intersect. Actions involving facial organs directly correspond to physiological changes in the human body and psychological emotional fluctuations. In the direct description of emotions, we often rely on the physical actions and changes of the face and facial organs for expression. Within the "把NP—V" construction, this constitutes the most fundamental and numerically dominant category of NPs representing Class D space. For example:

(18) 老爷听了这话,把脸一沉,问道:"阿哥!你在那里弄得许多银子?我平生于银钱一道,一介不苟,便是朋友有通财之谊,也须谊可通财的才可作将伯之呼;你若借了这事,向亲友各家不问交谊一概的沿门托钵摇尾乞怜起来,就大不是我的意思了!"(清小说文康 儿女英雄传 [18]).

(19) 何小姐才要开口,两个酒窝儿一动,把脸一红,凑到张姑娘耳畔说了几句,把个张姑娘乐的,连连点头,笑道:"姐姐,这叫作'兵法,攻心为上',又叫作'彭更有二焉'"(清小说文康 儿女英雄传).

Expressions such as "把脸一红" and "把脸一沉" transform abstract emotional states into concrete changes in facial spatiality. "红" is not merely a change in skin color; rather, it is the projection of inner shyness or embarrassment onto the color space of the face—a mapping of emotion as a transformation in facial hue. In a conversational context, when a character receives a signal from the speaker or agent, it is processed and internalized within their psychological space. Following this internalization, the body produces corresponding physiological reactions, such as blood flow to expressive organs, the tensing or relaxing of facial muscles, or movements of other facial features. After the emotional shift in the recipient's psychological space manifests in physiological space, it appears in physical space as a change in color, movement of facial organs, or alteration in their form. The continuous transformation across psychological space → physiological space → physical space within this construction is the combined effect and result of the spatial properties of the verb V or the dynamic adjective occupying the V position.

Similar to facial expressions, body posture also serves as a spatialized expression of a character's psychological attitude. For instance:

(20) 那老头子听了,把头一扭嘴一撇道:"唔!我要那东西作什么呀?我听见说,都是那些王公子大人,还得万岁爷赏,才使得着呢.慢讲我这儿使不着,就让越着礼使了去,也得活着对得起阎王爷,死了他好敬咱们,叫咱们好处托生啊!不然的时候,凭你就顶上个如来佛去,也是瞎闹,陀罗经被就中用么?"(清小说文康 儿女英雄传).

(21) 宝蟾把嘴一撇,笑说道:"罢哟!人家倒替奶奶拉纤,奶奶倒往我们说这个话咧"(清小说曹雪芹_高鹗 红楼梦 [19]).

(22) 他一听海马周三这话,把手一摆,说道:"周兄弟,你这话说远了.你我弟兄们有财同享,有马同骑,你的恩人就是我的恩人.何况这十三妹姑娘听起来是个盖世英雄,难道单是韩,李二位给他老太太磕的着头,我们就不该磕个头儿吗?在坐的众位有一个不给周家兄弟作这个脸同走一荡的,叫他先吃我黑金刚一杵!"(清小说文康 儿女英雄传).

Actions such as "把头一扭", "把嘴一撇", and "把手一摆" transcend mere physical movement of the body; they encode psychological attitudes such as rejection, disdain, and negation. The bodily gestures manifested in this construction represent the final output of the information recipient within the conversational context. Upon receiving the spoken information, the recipient must first process and evaluate it within psychological space. After reaching a conclusion, they generate corresponding physiological reactions based on their own emotional inclinations. Through the transmission of electrical signals in neurons, signals of psychological emotion are concretized into bodily movements, thereby realizing the continuous transformation from psychological space → physiological space → physical space. For example, in "把头一扭嘴一撇", the

old man, after receiving the speaker's verbal message, processes and interprets the conveyed information in his psychological space. This generates an emotional and attitudinal tendency, which translates into motor commands for bodily actions: "turning the head" and "curling the lips". The rotational movement of the old man's head and the muscular movement of his lips are not merely physical motions; they actually reflect the old man's dissatisfaction with the content of the interlocutor's message and the severing of his attention and psychological connection.

Within this construction, even abstract speech acts are incorporated into the system of spatial representation. For example:

(23) 蒋平把丢印事情一说, 大众一听, 也痴呆目瞪了 (清小说\石玉昆 小五义 [20]).

In the phrase "把丢印事情一说", the verb "say" (说) no longer merely denotes the physical act of producing sound. Instead, it is conceptualized as the transmission and displacement of an informational entity within communicative space, forming the cognitive structure of "speech as an entity moving through space". Furthermore, certain internal psychological processes are also endowed with spatial characteristics. For example:

(24) 起初再睡不着, 以后把心一静, 便睡去了, 岂知一夜安眠 (清小说\曹雪芹_高鹗 红楼梦).

(25) 熊威自己要寻一个自尽, 又一想挤着这条命进里面找冠袍带履, 于是把心一横, 二次又上了台阶 (清小说\石玉昆 小五义).

In expressions such as "把心一横" and "把心一静", "横" and "静" represent abstract determinations and states of tranquility as alterations within the spatial state of the heart. Through this spatial change, invisible psychological processes gain a concrete form of expression. This systematic extension from physical to psychological space fully demonstrates the semantic productivity and flexibility of the "把 NP—V" construction. Through the cognitive mechanism of spatialization, the abstract inner world acquires concrete forms of expression, thereby greatly enriching the expressive power and evocative force of the language.

4. The metonymic extension mechanism in the "把NP—V" construction

4.1. Cognitive foundations and theoretical basis of metonymic extension

Metonymy is one of the fundamental features of human cognition. People often use an easily understood or perceived aspect of something to refer to the thing as a whole, other parts of it, or other aspect [21]. Metonymy is a spontaneous, unconscious cognitive process that exploits conventional relationships of contiguity between two entities. It occurs within a single cognitive domain, does not involve cross-domain mapping, and provides mental access to the intended referent.

In the "把 NP—V" construction, due to the continuum of changes within the single cognitive domain encompassing physical, physiological, and psychological spaces, we aim to examine the metonymic mechanisms involved in this structure and how these mechanisms operate in its spatial transformations, spatial action changes, and spatial semantics. The metonymic extension in "把 NP—V" is grounded in spatial contiguity and cognitive frame association, realized through metonymic mapping. Its essence lies in achieving semantic extension through the mental access between a source concept and a target concept within an Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM). The inherent semantic feature of instantaneous causation in "把 NP—V" provides a readily available context for metonymic extension. Within an Idealized Cognitive Model, each applicable ICM constructs a mental space. This construction requires highlighting the immediate result of an action. Metonymy, as a cognitive mechanism more fundamental than metaphor, precisely bridges the gap between literal semantics and communicative needs through mapping relationships such as PART FOR WHOLE and ACTION FOR EVENT.

Metonymy plays a decisive role in reader's recognition and understanding of the construction's semantics. Its operational mechanism follows the reference point principle, using the overt elements NP or "Yi V" in "NP Yi V" as reference points to activate implicit semantic components existing within the same cognitive frame. This metonymic mechanism complements the sentence-fragment characteristic of the "把 NP—V" construction. The metonymic extension mechanism effectively meets the requirement for supplementary subsequent semantics by activating implicit results or events.

4.2. Core pathways and modes of realization for metonymic extension

Based on the analysis of the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus, the metonymic extension mechanism in the "把NP—V" construction is primarily realized through three pathways, all of which develop from the cognitive associations among action, event, and result.

In "把NP—V", "yi" serves as a marker of instantaneous action and, through metonymic mapping, stands for the entire action event. This pathway of metonymic extension employs the model of an instantaneous action substituting for the event. Here, the source concept of an instantaneous action activates the target concept of a complete event, including cause, action, and result. For example:

(26) 大姓夫妇, 见他说得可恶, 勃然大怒道: "我女闺中妙质, 等闲的不敢求聘; 你是何人? 辄敢胡言乱语!" 立起身把他一搥 (明\小说\凌濛初 初刻拍案惊奇).

In example (26), the instantaneous action of "搥" activates the complete event sequence: a couple, driven by anger, rises to push the speaker who is talking nonsense, leading to their emotional catharsis. Here, "搥" serves as a reference point for the characters' action, enabling readers to infer and understand the subsequent results of the event without requiring explicit and direct description. The instantaneous meaning conveyed by "yi" in the "把NP—V" construction defines the action's brevity and finality, providing grammatical support for the action substituting for the event. Consequently, the instantaneous action naturally becomes the most salient core semantic component within the complete event.

When the NP is an instrument or patient, the "把NP—V" construction employs a metonymic extension where the entity substitutes for the change of state. This associates the physical attributes of the NP with the process and result of the action. In this pathway, the NP loses its referential function and instead manifests the state change induced by the action. For example:

(27) 院子向前把那帘子只一卷, 卷起一半. 佛印打一看时, 只见那女孩儿半截露出那一双弯弯小脚儿 (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言).

In example (27), the patient NP 帘子 serves as the reference point. Through metonymic extension, it activates the resultant state of the curtain being rolled up. This expands the semantics of "把NP—V" from merely performing the action of "卷" to causing the spatial change of the curtain bending. In this type of metonymic extension, the concept of the NP and the resultant state of the action are relatively contiguous. The construction, through metonymy, suppresses the referential function of the NP, turning it into the carrier of the action's result. This aligns closely with the dispositive semantics inherent to the "把NP—V" construction.

When the construction emphasizes the agent's volition, it employs the metonymic extension of AGENT FOR ACTION. This pathway highlights the subjectivity-oriented disposal meaning. For example:

(28) 小童把吴宣教尽力一推, 推进床里 (明\小说\凌濛初 二刻拍案惊奇).

In example (28), the agent NP "他" serves as the reference point, activating a semantic chain from the agent actively initiating the "push" action to the resulting displacement. Here, the volition of the agent, the young servant, is highlighted, and the instantaneous nature of the action becomes the outward manifestation of its true purpose. Although the metonymic mechanism activates only the action related to the agent's intention, the dispositive semantics of the construction constrain the direction of the metonymic extension. Conversely,

the metonymic extension reinforces the degree of association between the agent and the action. This synergy allows the construction to express instantaneous actions with active dispositive meaning more precisely.

4.3. The metonymic extension pathway and mode of realization across physical-physiological-psychological spaces

Within this construction, the mechanism of domain extension plays a crucial role in integrating multidimensional spaces. Under the influence of the metonymic extension mechanism, the topic under discussion can be sustained and further reasoned, with the most prominent manifestation being the progressive transition across the three levels of space: physical, physiological, and psychological. Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual vehicle provides mental access to another conceptual entity within the same Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM). This explanation can be understood in three aspects: first, metonymy occurs within an "Idealized Cognitive Model"; second, the person forming the conceptualizer can reach the intended target of description via a mental bridge; third, our attention can be projected onto the cognitive object through specific concepts.

Thus, physical space, physiological space, and psychological space, as three spatial types grounded in the contiguity and relevance underlying metonymy, can serve as either input or output spaces, all connected through metonymy. We can observe that within the continuous spatial transformation of "把 NP—V", metonymy occurs inside an Idealized Cognitive Model. The character forming the conceptual vehicle, within the same ICM, translates emotional information via the bridge of psychological space. Abstract information such as emotions and intentions from psychological space is transformed, through physiological reactions, into concrete actions in physical space to achieve communicative transmission. Consequently, the character forming this conceptual vehicle transmits their intended communicative goal through the metonymic extension mechanism. Therefore, through this pathway, we can interpret that the speaker's emotions are projected onto the character's specific spatial actions.

In the continuous spatial transformation illustrated by examples like "把脸一红", metonymy occurs within an Idealized Cognitive Model. The character, after processing the physical information from the communicative discourse in psychological space, transmits their intended communicative purpose—such as expressing shyness or anger—via metonymy to physiological space. This is then metonymically mapped to physical space through physiological manifestations like changes in facial color, enabling the interlocutor in the communicative space to receive the emotional-communicative signal the character intends to convey.

In the metonymic extension across physical, physiological, and psychological spaces, both interlocutors are within the same Idealized Cognitive Model, and their cognition of the source and target concepts is fundamentally aligned. This allows for the rapid construal, within the communicative space, of the source concepts (e.g., emotions) encoded in the psychological space of both parties. Furthermore, they can capture the target concepts generated and transmitted to physical space through the metonymic extension mechanism in the form of actions and behaviors. This shared cognitive and conceptual transmission pathway jointly constructs a spatial context for both interlocutors. Moreover, within the single cognitive domain of space, metonymic extension operates bidirectionally and in parallel.

4.4. Constraining factors and boundary conditions of metonymic extension

Although, as discussed above, "把 NP—V" can undergo metonymic extension through various pathways and modes, this extension is not without limits. The pattern of metonymic extension is constrained by three factors: semantics, component properties, and contextual elements.

The core dispositive and instantaneous semantics of the construction delimit the scope of metonymic extension. Metonymy can only activate target concepts related to the instantaneous action and spatial change; it cannot extend to durative or non-dispositive events. This also explains why the construction imposes relatively strict requirements on the verbs it admits. For example:

(29) 商功父定睛看时, 只见这囚犯緋处, 左右各有一人, 执着大扇相对而立. 把大扇一挥, 这枷的囚犯叫一声"啊呀!" (明\小说\凌濛初 二刻拍案惊奇).

The phrase "把大扇一挥" can, through metonymy, activate the instantaneous result from the action of waving the fan to punishing a prisoner. However, it cannot extend to a durative event, such as waving the fan to repeatedly fan someone over a long period, because the semantics of the latter action violate the instantaneous semantic requirement of this construction.

Furthermore, verbs that can enter the "把NP—V" construction must possess the features of dynamicity and telicity. This requirement directly influences the scope of metonymic extension. Non-telic verbs, such as "听", find it difficult to activate a complete action event through metonymy. More importantly, there must be an interactive association between the action of the verb and the NP as either a patient or an instrument; otherwise, a concept of contiguity cannot be established cognitively. For example, "把天空一跑" is infelicitous because the NP "天空" and the verb "跑" cannot achieve cognitive semantic association, thus preventing metonymic extension.

Context also constrains metonymic extension. When a following clause introduces a result, metonymic extension only needs to activate part of the semantics, resulting in a weakened degree of extension. Conversely, when the following clause does not present a result, metonymic extension must activate the complete event, leading to an enhanced degree of extension. For example:

(30) 田大把手一推, 其树应手而倒, 根芽俱露 (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言).

(31) 把镜子向桌上一撇, 叹了一口气, 呆呆而坐, 准准的闷了一日不提 (明\小说\冯梦龙 醒世恒言).

In example (30), the subsequent clause "其树应手而倒" supplies the result following the action of pushing. Here, metonymy only needs to establish the causal connection between the action of "pushing" and the result of "the tree falling". However, in example (31), metonymy is required to activate the complete event where the action of "撇" expresses the character's depressed, bad mood. The metonymy needs to account for the specific reason behind the character tossing the mirror and its subsequent outcome, thereby exhibiting an enhanced degree of metonymic extension.

5. Pragmatic functions and spatial expression of the "把 NP — V" construction

The "把NP—V" construction integrates the aspectual function of "yi" with the spatial semantics of the verb, forming a semantic system characterized by instantaneousness, directionality, and spatiality, among other features. More importantly, through the mechanism of metonymic extension, this system successfully maps the expressive patterns of physical space onto the domains of physiological and psychological space. This achieves a semantic extension from the concrete to the abstract, from the external to the internal, constructing a comprehensive and rich spatial-semantic network.

In discourse, the "把 NP — V" construction exhibits strong clausal cohesion, often followed by a consecutive clause. This syntactic linkage is not coincidental but constitutes a coherent chain of spatial events.

From a spatial perspective, the preceding "把NP—V" clause typically initiates a spatial action, marking an instantaneous change in the spatial state of the NP. Following the execution of the action and the spatial transformation in the "把 NP — V" clause, it is often necessary to supplement this action by explaining the

character's subsequent behavior or the result of the action. Hence, a subsequent clause is required for elaboration, forming a relationship of sequence, cause-effect, or purpose with the preceding clause syntactically. In example (7) "把腰一伸", "伸" is the triggering action that causes a spatial change in bodily posture. The subsequent clauses "睁开双眼" and "说道" are the actions that follow from this initial action. These subsequent actions continue the process of spatial change initiated by the construction. After the bodily change occupies new physical space, the character proceeds with further actions and psychological shifts, continuing the multi-dimensional spatial transformation. The construction requires a subsequent clause to supplement the action's result; together, they constitute a complete chain of spatial events, which is the core reason for its syntactic cohesion. The clause containing "把NP—V" and the following clause jointly describe a complete spatial change event. This explains why, in the corpus, "把NP—V" often needs to be immediately followed by another clause; it is only with the supplementation of the subsequent clause that a complete event and spatial change can be described.

In contexts involving sequential action changes, "把NP—V" serves as one link in a series of spatial action transformations, its syntactic status being equal to and continuous with other action clauses. In example (5), the "把NP—V" construction alternates with ordinary verb structures. The character's actions proceed continuously from speaking, to pouring wine, to throwing the wine cup, constituting a rapidly shifting action space. Within the context, the "把NP—V" construction enriches the interactive scene of the characters, giving particular emphasis and rhythmic pause to the changes in their communicative setting, thereby vividly depicting a continuous and compact sequence of actions.

When the construction is used to provide a behavioral explanation for a character's speech, its spatial function is primarily to establish an on-site connection between the action and the utterance. For example:

(32) 八戒忍不住,把嘴一掬道:"你们可曾看见降猪王的和尚?"唬得那街上人,跌跌呱呱,都往两边闪过(明\小说\吴承恩《西游记》[22]).

In this sentence, the facial spatial action of "把嘴一掬" provides a vivid scenario for the subsequent utterance, "你们可曾看见降猪王的和尚?", enhancing the sense of immediate spatial imagery.

Simultaneously, the subjectivity and intersubjectivity of the "把NP—V" construction exhibit distinct spatial dimensions. The construction conveys a relatively subjective and bounded temporal concept, where the specific duration and dynamic aspect of the action actually depend on the speaker's psychological expectation and attitude towards it. From a spatial perspective, this subjectivity is also manifested as the speaker's subjective control over spatial action parameters, such as displacement distance and the scope of the action's effect. The spatial dimension of intersubjectivity in this construction is reflected in the speaker's attention to the hearer's spatial cognitive state. In different contexts, the degrees of objectivity, subjectivity, and intersubjectivity conveyed by "把NP—V" vary. By employing the "把NP—V" construction, the speaker mitigates the imposition force of a directive and also demonstrates consideration for the hearer's face and feelings.

6. Conclusion

This study, using early modern Chinese texts such as *Sanyan Erpai* as its core corpus, systematically investigates the verbal spatiality and metonymic extension mechanisms of the "把NP—V" construction, filling a gap in existing research regarding its spatial dimensions. The main conclusions are as follows:

(1) Through the aspectual function of "yi", the spatial substantiality of NP, and the integration of adverbial elements, the construction builds a comprehensive system of spatial expression. "Yi", as an aspectual marker, highlights the instantaneous activation of spatial action and the immediate triggering of its path. NPs are

predominantly body-part, instrument, and abstract types, with abstract NPs acquiring spatial attributes through metonymy. Adverbials refine the spatial trajectory, making the expression of displacement events more precise.

(2) The verbs in this construction exhibit significant spatial adaptability. Based on the analysis of the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus, verbs can be classified into 8 categories according to their spatial adaptability, encompassing all four classes of space (A, B, C, D). Among these, verbs demonstrate the strongest adaptability to Class B space. Although verbs adaptable to Class D space are limited in number, they reflect the construction's characteristic of extending from physical to psychological space. The spatial adaptability of verbs reveals the intrinsic connection between action and space.

(3) The metonymic extension mechanism within the construction is primarily realized through three core pathways: an instantaneous action substituting for a complete event, an NP entity substituting for a change of state, and an agent substituting for a volitional action. All revolve around the cognitive association of "action—event—result". More importantly, the metonymic extension mechanism enables the construction to undergo continuous transformation from physical space to physiological space and then to psychological space. Through the concrete expression of physical-space actions involving facial organs and body posture, it maps onto abstract physiological reactions and psychological emotions. This path of extension aligns with the cognitive pattern of humans understanding abstract concepts through spatial cognition.

(4) The discourse-pragmatic functions of the construction are closely linked to its spatial characteristics. Its clausal cohesion stems from the need for coherence in spatial events: the construction initiates a spatial action, and a subsequent clause supplements the action's result or ensuing behavior, forming a complete event. In contexts of sequential actions, it enhances the vividness and rhythm of the scene through the rapid switching of spatial actions. Furthermore, its subjectivity is manifested as the speaker's subjective control over spatial action parameters, while its intersubjectivity is reflected in attention to the hearer's spatial cognitive state, making the discourse expression more adaptable.

By adopting the dual perspectives of spatiality and metonymic mechanisms, this study reveals the unique grammatical features of the "把NP—V" construction, providing new theoretical support for research on the Chinese Ba-construction and for cognitive linguistics. A limitation of the research is its primary reliance on the *Sanyan Erpai* corpus. Future studies could expand the corpus scope to investigate the historical trajectory of this construction's evolution. Furthermore, cross-linguistic comparison could be conducted to explore typological differences in spatial expression across languages, thereby deepening our understanding of the relationship between Chinese grammar and cognition.

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