

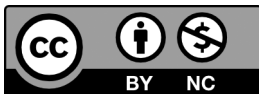
# “No AA, No BB, still VP (AA 没有, BB 没有, 还 VP)” Unmarked Causal Sentence Analysis

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**Abstract:** This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Chinese “No AA, No BB, still VP” construction, characterizing it as an unmarked causal compound sentence. This sentence pattern exhibits distinct syntactic and semantic features: First, the cause clause employs a topic-copying construction to indicate emphasis and pervasiveness; Second, the result clause utilizes the interrogative adverb “还” to express a rhetorical question to introduce a counter-expectation outcome. Conjunctions do not overtly mark the causal logic but are instead inferentially derived from the semantic interplay between the clauses: the negation of a necessary condition in the cause clause leads to the negation of a result. We thus argue that this structure constitutes a specific type of negative causal-inferential sentence. Typically, the cause is presented as a predetermined, uncontestable fact, while the result either denotes an impossible outcome or serves to refute a presupposition. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of topic-prominence and implicit logical relations in Chinese complex sentences.

**Keywords:** Causal Compound Sentence; Unmarked; Inferential



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## 1 Introduction

Modern Chinese features numerous sentences structured as “No AA, No BB, yet VP.” Consider:

(1) 水水没有, 地地没有, 还种粮食?

No water, no land, and you still want to grow grain?

(2) 吃的吃的没有, 喝的喝的没有, 还叫我们干活?

We have nothing to eat, nothing to drink, yet you still ask us to work?

Academic discussions on the classification of such constructions are scarce. We propose that they belong to unmarked causal inference patterns, where the antecedent and consequent clauses form an inferential causal relationship.

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This relationship does not rely on explicit causal markers. However, it is inferred through contextual semantics, establishing a clear causal link between the cause (the event) and its consequence (the outcome), corresponding to the already-occurred and yet-to-occur aspects. For Example, in (1), “water” and “land” are indispensable conditions for growing grain; without these, the outcome of grain production is impossible. Similarly, “food” and “drink” serve to replenish energy. For laborers, eating sufficiently provides the strength to work. The current lack of energy thus logically implies an inability to work. “Eating and drinking” are sufficient conditions for “working,” and conversely, they are also necessary conditions. Based on the facts established in the preceding clause, the subsequent clause can be analyzed. The negative semantics across clauses allow this sentence pattern to reflect the speaker’s emotional judgment and convey personal subjective evaluation, making it worthy of in-depth analysis.

This paper explores the syntactic and semantic characteristics of such clauses and analyzes their pragmatic functions.

## 2 Syntactic Features of “No AA, No BB, still VP”

Chinese compound sentences exhibit distinct syntactic cohesion, with connectives often omitted or implicit, unrestricted by rigid formal constraints, thus allowing greater flexibility. Overall, the clauses in “No AA, No BB, still VP” form a causal logical relationship, with the causal marker implicitly omitted. Examining the syntactic features of the clauses in detail: the cause clause is constructed using nominal copying, indicating emphasis and pervasiveness; the result clause employs the interrogative adverb “still” to express rhetorical questioning, serving a counter-expectation function.

### 2.1 Cause Clause: Topic Copying and Subclause Antithesis

“Copying” specifically refers to syntactic repetition at the structural level, differing from simple duplication. While repetition involves consecutive identical phrases to intensify emphasis or emotion, copying involves structurally distinct syntactic roles for the two identical components (Li, 2018). In the “No AA, No BB” structure, “AA” and “BB” constitute a topic-copying construction. The first “A” in “AA” is the topic, while the second “A” copies it, simultaneously functioning as a syntactic element (subject). This differs from nominal reduplication, as the “AA” combination is not tightly bound; a pausal rhythm separates them, resulting in the prosodic pattern “No AA, No BB.”

The syntactic format of the reason clause exists as a parallel structure, convertible to “Want A? No A. Want B? No B”—a special emphatic pattern in colloquial speech. The duplication of “A” and “B” carries additional meaning, indicating enumeration. Enumeration typically involves two parallel clauses forming a compound sentence with a coordinate relationship. This determines that the construction “No AA, No BB” is a contiguous structure that cannot stand alone. Furthermore, A and B are generally nominal components.

The reason clause typically begins with a noun-duplication pattern. In “Neither A nor B,” “A” and “B” exhibit several characteristics. First, their positions cannot be altered; they must occupy the initial structural position. Otherwise, the pattern ceases to be a duplication, transforming into structures like “No A, no B, and VP,” which exhibit strong structural stability. Second, structurally, “A” is a noun while “AA” functions as a noun-copula construction. Unlike typical reduplications such as kinship terms or compound Chinese words like “星星 (stars)” or “娃娃 (dolls),” “AA”

is not an independently usable unit. It represents a specialized structure within particular sentence patterns, serving only specific functions within the sentence. Finally, “AA” is typically a bare noun, unmodified by other words.

(3) 这个村子，水水没有，电电没有，还谈发展？

This village has no running water, no electricity—and they still talk about development?

(4) 服务服务没有，特色菜特色菜没有，还想冲击米其林？

No services, no signature dishes—and you still want to aim for Michelin?

Example (3): “No water, no electricity” employs “water” and “electricity” as copy components, providing a concise enumeration of the village’s deficiencies to represent a broader absence.

Similarly, in Example (4), the nouns “service” and “specialty dishes” appear in parallel clauses, forming a stable structure. The copy-style construction has enumerative and emphatic functions, stressing “complete absence” or “total negation.” This structure carries a topic-oriented feature; for instance, “服务服务没有” can be seen as a colloquial variant of “服务是没有的 (No services),” further emphasizing subjective negation.

Formally, the number of syllables in the nouns of the two clauses is generally equal, creating symmetry and neatness. However, there are exceptions, such as the symmetry between the repetition of a disyllabic noun, e.g., “服务 (services)” and a trisyllabic noun, e.g., “特色菜 (signature dishes)” in Example (4).

## 2.2 Result Clause: The Exclusionary Feature Marked by “还”

Result clauses are formed by “还 + VP,” where “还” functions as a “counter-expectation marker.” Counter-expectation signifies the speaker’s subjective judgment, typically expressing criticism or reproach. This counter-expectation meaning constitutes the core function of “还” in causal sentences, particularly in interrogative sentences. Here, “还” derives a contrasting meaning opposite to expectations through its continuative sense—a usage already matured in the Song Dynasty (Wu, 2009).

Generally, the modal adverb “还” occupies the outermost position in sentences, exhibiting flexible usage with weak linkage to the main verb, thus maintaining considerable distance from the primary predicate verb. However, within counterfactual conditional sentences, “还” is constrained by the characteristics of counterfactual compound sentences, reducing its flexibility. It typically appears after the subject and before the predicate, distributed either in the antecedent clause or the consequent clause. (Ma, 2021) In result clauses, “还” is constrained by the “cause-effect” relationship, exhibiting more fixed distribution patterns.

“还” emphasizes temporal unreality, followed by an action that has not yet occurred. In terms of tense and aspect, it consistently employs the unreal aspect, avoiding markers like “了/过.” It builds upon the hypothetical premise of the causal clause, negating the current state of the premise to create a contrast between the negation of present reality and the potential action. For Example:

(5) 听说我感冒，还主动煮了可乐煲姜。

Hearing I had a cold, he even took the initiative to make ginger-infused cola.

(6) 因为很想了解地更深入些，还看过几本红学研究的书。

Because I wanted to understand it deeper, I even read several books on Redology research.

(7) 破单位，假假没有，钱钱没有，还想我们上班？

Tough work, no vacation, no money, and you still want us to work?

(8) 破单位，假假没有，钱钱没有，还想了 / 过我们上班？ \*

Tough work, no vacation, no money, and you still wanted us to work?

(9) 你那块地阳光阳光没有，养料养料没有，还种什么树？

Your plot of land has no sunlight, no nutrients—what kind of trees do you expect to grow there?

(10) 你那块地阳光阳光没有，养料养料没有，还种了 / 过什么树？ \*

Your plot of land has no sunlight, no nutrients—what kind of trees did you plant there?

The particle “还” is flexible in usage and context. Its subsequent clause can denote past completed actions, as in Example (5) “煮了” (boiled) and Example (6) “看过” (read); or it can express rhetorical questioning, as in Example (7) “还想我们上班？” (You still want us to work?). The result clause in “No AA, No BB, still VP” imposes temporal and aspectual constraints. The rhetorical question is limited to events that have not yet occurred. Examples (7) and (9) question actions that have not yet happened—going to work and planting trees. It cannot be used in the past tense; examples (8) and (10) violate grammatical norms.

### 3 Semantic Characteristics of “No AA, No BB, still VP”

The clauses before and after “No AA, No BB, still VP” collectively express a causal relationship. The “AA” and “BB” in the cause clause carry the semantic feature of “everyone,” while the result clause restricts the outcome to an analytical conclusion rather than a factual one.

#### 3.1 Full Quantity Meaning Feature: Pseudo-Redundancy vs. Duplication

The topic-copying constructions are a formal repetition. However, this repetition does not serve rhetorical emphasis (the role of duplication) but rather fulfills syntactic and pragmatic needs. The full quantity meaning originates from copying, not reduplication, though both share similarities in expressing “quantity.” Noun reduplication carries syntactic significance related to quantity. The syntactic meaning of nominal reduplication varies across contexts, yet most scholars agree it relates to the category of “quantity” (Zhang & Lü, 2024). Primary views include “quantity adjustment” and “quantification,” though the direction of adjustment—whether increasing or decreasing—remains uncertain. Topic-copying structures are also intrinsically linked to the category of “quantity,” involving two aspects: semantic intensification and semantic augmentation (Li, 2018). These correspond to strengthening the degree of meaning and adding new semantic layers, respectively. Generally, they only express one-way emphasis or increment, not reduction.

(11) 这个村子，水水没有，电电没有，还谈发展？

This village has no running water, no electricity—and they still talk about development?

(12) 服务服务没有，特色菜特色菜没有，还想冲击米其林？

No services, no signature dishes—and you still want to aim for Michelin?

Example (11) employs the pseudo-redundancy “服务服务 (services)” and “特色菜特色菜 (signature dishes),” which

do not introduce new meaning. The copy of “service” and “signature dish” primarily emphasizes the degree of scarcity. Simultaneously, it indicates the surrounding area, using a single point to represent the whole, meaning there is absolutely no service whatsoever. Similarly, the copy of “water” and “electricity” in Example (12) signifies that, regardless of the type of water or the source of electricity, neither of them exists.

Beyond this, the semantic scope of pseudo-redundancy expands from the particular to the general, making it more comprehensive. The “AA” and “BB” reduplications achieve a rhetorical metonymic effect, where a part stands for the whole. For instance, in Example (12), the overlapping “service” and “signature dishes” metonymically represent the restaurant’s overall performance and standards. Similarly, the overlapping “water” and “electricity” in Example (11) does not merely indicate the lack of water and electricity, but metonymically signifies inadequate facilities.

### 3.2 Analytic Conclusions: Incongruent Contrasts of Actuality and Potentiality

Xing Fuyi (2001) identifies two types of causal compound sentences: explanatory complex sentences and deductive complex sentences. Based on the content of the preceding and following clauses, these are further categorized into two logical sequences: “inferring the result from the cause (据因断果)” and “inferring the cause from the result (据果断因).” Depending on the circumstances, causal compound sentences can be classified into two states: actualized and potential.

The first one, “inferring the result from the cause,” involves a cause that is already present. At the same time, the conclusion represents either an inference about the objective situation or a subjective reaction. The subsequent clause contains words indicating general possibility, necessity, or certainty (Su, 2017). “AA” and “BB” state objective conditions, corresponding to the “cause” being already present. The subsequent clause “VP” describes an outcome contrary to fact, where “still” indicates the speaker’s subjective negation, deeming it an unattainable, future state. “AA is absent, BB is absent, yet VP” exemplifies the “concluding the effect based on the cause” pattern. The cause clause states an objectively lacking condition (present), while the effect clause describes an impossible event (typically future). For Example:

(13) 厂子才刚起步，资金资金没有，渠道渠道没有，还想着赚钱？

The factory has just started up. There’s no funding, no sales, and you still expect to make money?

(14) 这间屋子，空调空调没有，电扇电扇没有，这么热的天，还想住人？

This room has no air conditioning, no electric fan—how can anyone live here?

(15) 荣誉荣誉没有，学历学历没有，把他招进来了，还怎么服众？

He has no honors, no academic credentials—how can he command respect if hired?

Example (13): The act of “making money” is impossible. The established conditions—“no capital” and “no channels”—dictate the inevitable impossibility of the outcome. Example (14) follows the same logic as Example (13). The inferred conditions are facts, and the conclusions negate outcomes that have not yet occurred. The house is too hot to live in; the interviewee cannot be hired—both are events that have not occurred. Through inference, they may influence the direction of subsequent events. Whether refuting an already-occurred fact or evaluating a future event, both inference processes follow causal logic. The commonality among these examples is that the outcome is an analytical conclusion, not a factual one.

## 4 Generating Negative Evaluative Meaning

The statement “No AA, No BB” sets the condition, while “still VP” introduces the result. To directly negate expectations, the speaker must first negate the presupposed condition. The preceding clause stating the cause serves as contextual support for the interrogative sentence to form a negative judgment—the former as a condition, the latter as a proposition. The counterfactual result clause exhibits the semantic feature of “proposition + negation.” Combined with the “还 (still)” result clause, the propositional meaning shifts from neutral to one carrying the speaker’s negative inclination.

Evaluation constructions primarily consist of two parts, ultimately supported by two arguments to express the speaker’s thesis. The thesis often appears in the clause following the arguments. Based on the negation of the preceding causal clause’s condition and the negation applied to the result, a negative inference is formed, creating a negative causal inference compound sentence that conveys the speaker’s negative evaluation of the matter. For Example:

(16) 我们那个年代，吃的吃的没有，用的用的没有，还玩游乐场呢？压根没你这待遇。

Back in our day, we had nothing to eat, nothing to use, and amusement parks? Forget about it. We never got that kind of treatment.

(17) 这个地方太偏了，一点都不方便，谁提议的，车车没有，船船没有，还团建呢？

This place is way too remote—utterly inconvenient. Who even suggested it? No cars, no boats—and you still expect us to camp here?

Example (16) The lack of “food” and “necessities” serves as evidence for the hardships of life in the past. The negative evaluative construction acts as the predicate to state and explain information related to the topic. Example (16) should depict a father or other elder deriving a negative evaluation from personal experience—the past was marked by material scarcity—hoping the listener gains new insight, understands their emotional stance, and responds accordingly. Example (17) “Cars” and “ships” serve as key indicators for evaluating transportation development. The absence of these vehicles enhances the credibility of claims regarding transportation difficulties and regional remoteness. The evaluative subject is well-founded and logically coherent, with both elements collectively fulfilling the evaluative function.

## 5 Implied Causality and Hidden Markers

Modern Chinese contains numerous unmarked causal compound sentences. Two simple methods exist to integrate two or more clauses without using connectives: First, through semantic relationships, such as parataxis, where clauses in a compound sentence may be linked without any grammatical components (Wang, 1984). Chinese sentences emphasize spatial separation and do not necessarily require conjunctions; semantic relationships are “implied and supplemented through experience, context, linguistic intuition, and insight” (Wang, 2013). The second method relies on syntactic structure, where the mandatory presence or omission of connectives is formally determined by syntactic construction.

Certain non-standard syntactic structures—such as element omission, repetition, or word order inversion—permit the omission of compound sentence linkage markers (Wang, 2021). These two mechanisms may be employed independently or in combination.

Sentence-level meaning derivation serves as a crucial semantic mechanism for causal marker ellipsis. Subclauses typically depict objective causal relationships between events, aligning with universal cognitive patterns such as “cause-effect,” “hypothesis-inference,” or “preceding-subsequent.” Unmarked causal compound sentences rely on inferential semantic relationships between clauses to omit relational markers. Within the discourse context, the unmarked causal compound sentence “No AA, No BBt, still VP” exhibits a “cause-inference” semantic relationship. In such sentences, the subordinate clause indicates the cause, while the main clause denotes the result. The subordinate clause serves as supplementary information for judgment, with the focus of the inferential causal relationship lying in deducing the outcome. Given the tight and clear semantic connection, causal markers can be omitted.

Marking causative compound sentences is flexible: both cause and effect can be marked simultaneously, only one component may be marked, or no marking may occur at all. Unmarked causative expressions have always existed in Chinese. To determine if a sentence is unmarked causative, we can either infer logical relationships from the semantic dependencies in the preceding and following context at the comprehension level or simultaneously transform and analyze unmarked causative compound sentences at the formal level, restoring causal markers to observe these sentences.

Aligning with the speaker-listener’s forward reasoning sequence reflects logical thinking direction. Clear “condition-result” logical order does not necessitate explicit marking. The inferential causal sequence “No AA, No BB, still VP” exhibits strong semantic cohesion. From the perspective of clause self-sufficiency, it does not necessitate correlative conjunctions. Causal relationships exist on a spectrum, ranging from strong to weak. When the causal relationship within a compound sentence is unambiguous, explicit markers need not be employed to artificially reinforce causality.

Representative causal markers include “because.../so...(因为……所以……)” for explanatory causality. The conjunction “since.../then...(既然……就……)” indicates inferential causality. To determine whether a complex sentence involves inferential causation, perform a transformational analysis. The sentence can be transformed by adding a conjunction to create a marked causal complex sentence, thus indicating inferential causation. For Example:

(18) 菜菜没有，厨师厨师没有，还摆酒席？

No vegetables, no chef, you still want a banquet?

(19) 既然菜菜没有，厨师厨师没有，就不要摆酒席。

Since there are no dishes and no cook, don’t host a banquet.

(20) 笔笔没有，课本课本没有，你还上什么课？给我站后面去。

If you don’t have a pen and you don’t have a textbook, what kind of class are you going to take? Stand in the back.

(21) 既然笔笔没有，课本课本没有，就不要上课。

Since there’s no pen, no textbook, why bother attending class?

(22) 房子房子没有，车子车子没有，还结什么婚？

No house, no car—what’s the point of getting married?

(23) 既然房子房子没有，车子车子没有，就不要结婚。

Since there's no house, no car, don't get married.

All the above examples can be transformed into marked causal sentences by adding the causal marker “since (既然)” and replacing “still (还)” with the resultative marker “then (就).” Converting Example (18) into Example (19) clarifies the causal relationship: the clause following “since (既然)” expresses cause, while the clause after “then (就)” expresses result. Similarly, Examples (20) and (21) can also be converted.

Causal markers are essential tools for revealing causal relationships in complex sentences. Causal conjunctions can be used together or individually in either the preceding or following clause. Combining conjunctions convey greater formality and precision, making them more common in written language. Using a “cause” conjunction alone emphasizes the reason, while using a “result” conjunction alone highlights the consequence—both frequently appearing in spoken language (Huang & Liao, 2007). Unmarked causal-consequential sentences, like single-linkers, typically appear in spoken language and are rarely used in writing. They offer greater flexibility and vividness, characterized by high economy and expressive efficiency. Secondly, causal markers serve as crucial grammatical devices to reinforce the relationship between clauses, with the marked portion receiving emphasis. In unmarked causal constructions, the result clause “还 VP” is already emphasized by the interrogative tone of “还,” thus omitting the result marker to avoid semantic redundancy.

As an analytic language, Chinese imposes relatively fewer formal constraints on sentence structure. Word order in unmarked causal compound sentences—the focus of this study—is more flexible than in marked variants, lacking the latter's strict precision. Yet in everyday spoken communication, this form adheres to the principle of economy, facilitating the speaker's expression and mutual understanding, making it highly representative.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper centers on the special sentence pattern “No AA, No BB, still VP” to explore its syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features as an unmarked causal compound sentence. Research reveals that this construction establishes a unique negative causal inference through the combination of nominal copying and the interrogative marker “还.” The causal clause emphasizes the absence of overall conditions via topic copying and juxtaposition. In contrast, the result clause expresses a negative evaluation of the unrealized outcome through the counter-expectation function of “还”, collectively forming a “deducing consequences from causes” logical framework. Formally, this construction relies on semantic cohesion rather than explicit markers, reflecting the flexibility and economy of Chinese compound sentences. Functionally, its strong negative evaluative meaning and emotional expression give it distinct pragmatic value in spoken communication. Furthermore, the construction can be converted into a marked causal compound sentence by adding conjunctions like “既然……就……” (since... then...), further validating its inherent inferential causal nature.

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