Investigation of the Cooperative Mode and Second Language Acquisition of Chinese Apology Words from the Perspective of Construction Grammar

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Abstract

Based on the theory of construction grammar, this paper examines the cooperative mode and second language acquisition of Chinese apology words. It demonstrates the acquisition process and mechanism of Chinese apology words by second language learners. From the perspective of construction grammar, Chinese apology words are the intersection of form and meaning/function. There are frame structures and non-frame structures in the cooperative mode, and additionally, there are complete and omitted forms. The learner's output of apology words includes errors and correct usage. Errors include wrong coordinated mode selection, out-of-order coordination components, incomplete coordination components, and misuse of coordination components. The correct output refers to the cooperative model of the learner's apology words, including the location, usage, and selection of the components, which can be used accurately. The internal acquisition mechanism of these outputs is the learner's "coordination awareness" of apology words. The mastery of "coordination awareness" can be divided into levels and stages. There are three levels in StageⅠ, namely, no coordination awareness, preliminary coordination awareness and basic coordination awareness. StageⅡ means that the learner has complete coordination awareness, which shows that the learner's acquisition of apology words is staged and hierarchical.

Introduction

The speech act of the apology is indispensable in human communication. In daily life, when people perceive something wrong with their words and behavior or disturb, hurt, influence, trouble, or offend others, they usually use apologies to express guilt. For Chinese learners, mastering the correct usage of apology words and adopting appropriate apology strategies are two necessary conditions for smoothly developing the speech act of making a Chinese apology in communication. Between words and strategies, apology words are the primary knowledge point in Chinese when taught as a second language. It is also one of the difficult points of teaching, which is reflected in the high frequency of the appearance and use of apology words. However, because of its special semantic relationship, cooperative mode and syntactic configuration, there are different structural types of the basic expression, so learners are prone to errors in learning its use. At present, analyzing the meaning and usage of this type of vocabulary and explaining its acquisition process and mechanism with a new perspective and new method to establish a more appropriate teaching method have become hot topics.

In recent years, research on Chinese construction grammar has achieved significant results. Among these, the concept of "combining construction grammar with Chinese in second language acquisition and teaching research" proposed by Shi (2011, 2017) represents a breakthrough in the development of Chinese construction grammar. Shi proposed to investigate the distribution of constructions in various teaching syllabi and textbooks of Chinese as a foreign language and to reanalyze the basic situation and existing problems in studying Chinese constructions for second language teaching. At present, scholars such as Zhan (2017), Zhang (2018), and Cheng (2018) have further sorted out and explored the connotations and application scope of this concept and believe that it is feasible and cutting-edge to apply it to research on the acquisition and teaching of Chinese as a second language.

This research is thus based on construction grammar theory; it determines the number and types of apology words in Chinese textbooks and sorts out the cooperative mode of apology words and the relationship between form and meaning. Moreover, this research also obtains the mechanism for acquisition based on the output of apology words in the interlanguage corpus. The specific methodology is as follows: First, the eight sets of words commonly used in Chinese teaching[[1]] to express apology were exhaustively collected and analyzed. Then, the collected corpus was put into the HSK Dynamic Composition Corpus for retrieval, the output sentences of the learners that were obtained from the corpus were classified, and the types of errors were sorted. Finally, we explored the learning process and mechanism of the learner's acquisition of apology vocabulary based on construction grammar. This research aims to enrich the study of second language acquisition of Chinese constructions and provide research references for establishing construction grammar teaching methods.

[[1]] They are *Boya Chinese*, *Developing Chinese*, *New Practical Chinese Textbook*, *HSK Standard Course*, *Chinese Course*, *Bridge Chinese*, *Chinese Listening Course*, *Spoken Chinese Course*.

Basic Attributes Of Chinese Apology Words

From Goldberg's (1995, 2006) definition of constructions, it could be inferred that each construction is a ligand of form and meaning/function. Apology words have different structural types in form and can express similar relevant semantic information with different starting points, degrees, and emotional attitudes. At the same time, they have the pragmatic function of apology that other constructions do not have. It is a ligand of "form and meaning/function", so all apology words belong to constructions. The specificity of the apology construction lies in its special cooperative mode and usage characteristics. Therefore, this article will investigate the cooperative mode of a total of 26 apology words (Table 1) in the above eight types of textbooks based on Yuan's (1997) valence study of Chinese verbs, nouns and adjectives.

Table 1
Basic attributes of apology words

Apology Words	English Interpretation	Pinyin	Apology Words	English Interpretation	Pinyin	Apology Words	English Interpretation	Pinyin
打扰	disturb	darao	对不起	sorry	guoyibuqu	内疚	guilty	kuijiu
道歉	apologize	daoqian	抱歉	apologize	peibushi	内疚	guilty	neijiu
对不起	sorry	duibuqi	道歉	apology	qianyi	内疚	guilty	qianjiu
对不起	sorry	duibuzhu	错	wrong	cuo	内疚	shame	xiuchi
背叛	betray	gufu	责怪	blame	guai	内疚	ashamed	xiukui
麻烦	trouble	mafan	后悔	regret	houhui	内疚	regret	yihan
对不起	sorry	baoqian	自责	self-blame	zize	内疚	forgive	liangjie
傲慢	presumptuous	maomei	打扰	disturbed	buan	内疚	forgive	yuanliang
对不起	excuse me	buhaoyisi	内疚	ashamed	cankui			

The cooperative mode of verbal apology words

Yuan Yulin (1998) divides Chinese verbs into unary verbs, binary verbs and ternary verbs according to the difference in the number of arguments that verbs could control. Binary verbs could dominate two arguments, and the relationship between the verb and the argument is syntactically mandatory. In a nonelliptical context, the argument cannot be deleted, and a missing argument will cause the sentence to be incorrect. According to the semantic relationship between two arguments, binary verbs can be divided into collaborative and targeted verbs. The relationship between the two arguments in a collaborative verb is bidirectional and symmetrical, while a targeted verb is unidirectional and irreversible. According to Yuan's valence theory, apology words dominate the two arguments, "NP1" and "NP2". Among them, "NP1" means agent or cause, and "NP2" means recipient or cause. There is a unidirectional and irreversible relationship between the two. For example, the relationship between the two arguments involved in "I apologize to you (对不起)" is "I → you". Therefore, all the verbal apology words involved in this research are binary targeted verbs. If preposition guidance is needed, binary targeted verbs can be divided into true binary targeted verbs and quasi-binary targeted verbs. The cooperative modes of the two are nonframed coordination and framed coordination. Each cooperative mode also has a complete form and an omitted form.

True binary targeted verbs do not require a preposition to guide the argument, whose cooperative mode is in a nonframed structure, which can be divided into a complete form and an abbreviated form. The complete form of the cooperative mode is

"NP1+ ____ +NP2", for example:

1) 对不起!

I apologize to you!

2) 对不起

I apologize to you.

3) 很遗憾我说过那句话

I regret having said that.

4) 对不起!

You have betrayed the trust of your superiors!

5) 对不起

Please forgive me.

6) 对不起

I have troubled you too much.

Among them, "对不起 (forgive)", "对不起 (forgive)", "打扰 (disturb)", "对不起 (blame)", and "对不起 (betray)" have passive usage of the non-framed structure in the form of "NP1+对不起+NP2+ ____". At this time, "NP1" means victim, and "NP2" means agent, for example:

7) 对不起, 对不起, 对不起

Unless we change our current lifestyle, we will not be forgiven by future generations.

8) 对不起

They will not be forgiven by others.

9) 对不起

I was blamed by the older adult.

10) 对不起

I have betrayed your kindness.

The omitted form of the true binary targeted verbs refers to omitting arguments (NP1 or NP2) in a specific context, including agent, recipient, cause, etc. These omitted arguments could be inferred and supplemented by the situational context, which is essentially different from the absence or deletion of arguments. The omitted form includes two types: complete omission and partial omission. The complete omission shows that some apology words could be directly used as single sentences, and the cooperative mode is "(under a certain context) ____". Partial omission means that "NP1" (agent) is omitted in a specific context, "NP2" (subject) cannot be omitted, and the cooperative mode is "(under a certain context) ____ +NP2". For example:

11) 对不起! (A 对不起 B, A 对不起 B)

Sorry! (A lost B's data, what A said to B)

12) 对不起! (A 对不起 B, A 对不起 B)

I'm sorry! (A did not complete the task assigned to him by B, what A said to B)

13) 对不起! (A 对不起 B, A 对不起 B)

Excuse me. (A asks B in an urgent matter without making an appointment in advance, what A said to B)

14) 对不起! (B 对不起 A, A 对不起 B)

Too much trouble for you! (B prepared a birthday surprise for A, what A said to B)

15) 太麻烦了, 生日惊喜, 对不起(A对B说)

Yes, I made up lies. Please forgive me. (A lies to B)

In the above example, the first three are completely omitted forms, and the last two are partially omitted forms. According to the context, these examples could be expanded to the complete forms:

16) A对B说: "对不起"

A said to B: "I'm sorry."

17) A对B说: "对不起"

A said to B, "I cannot help you."

18) A对B说: "对不起"

A said to B, "I disturbed you."

19) A对B说: "对不起"

A said to B, "I have troubled you too much."

20) A对B说: "对不起"

A said to B: "Please forgive me."

Quasi-binary targeted verbs mean that two noun elements have a mandatory syntactic connection between them. When two noun elements co-occur, one of the noun elements must be guided by a preposition. The cooperative mode of the quasi-binary targeted verbs could also be divided into a complete form and an omitted form.

The cooperative mode of the complete form has the frame structure "NP1 + preposition + NP2", and guiding prepositions include "向 (toward)", "为 (for)", "对 (for)", "和 (and)", "给 (for)", and so on. There is also the frame structure "preposition + NP2 + NP1+___" in which the preposition is moved forward in the sentence. This time, "NP2" mainly indicates the reasons. For example:

21) 向Staffer Lin道歉

You apologize to Staffer Lin when you are free.

22) 有空时, 向Staffer Lin道歉

Even so, you still have to apologize to him.

23) 即使这样, 你仍然要向Staffer Lin道歉

The court required the defendant to apologize to the plaintiff.

24) 被告向原告道歉

You're going to make amends to me.

25) 你要向我道歉

He deeply regretted never inquiring about her husband.

The omitted form is a partial omission; the omitted components are prepositions and NP2, and the cooperative mode is "(under a certain context) NP1+ ___", for example:

26) 唉, 对不起(A对B说, B对A说对不起, A对B说)

Well, I apologize. (A misunderstood B, what A said to B after understanding B's true thoughts)

27) 唉, 对不起(A对B说, B对A说对不起)

I regret it very much, but it is too late to regret it. (What A said to B after losing all his family belongings

in gambling)

28) 我後悔得很, 但我後悔得太遲了。(A對B說)

Every time I see my poor grades, I blame myself. (What A said to B because of bad grades)

The prepositions and NP2 in Examples (29) to (31) could be restored through an understanding of the context:

29) A對B: “我後悔”

A said to B: "I apologize to you."

30) A對B: “我後悔得很”

A said to B: "I regret losing all my wealth through gambling."

31) A對B: “我後悔得很”

A said to B: "I blame myself for my poor grades."

The cooperative mode of adjective apology words

Yuan (1997) believes that the valence of an adjective refers to the number of supplementary words that an adjective can carry, including necessary supplementary words and optional supplementary words. Among them, the unary adjective has only one phrase in the corpus, "錯 (wrong)", and the cooperative mode is the frame structure "NP1+___", for example: "你, 他 (you are right, and he is wrong)." The rest of the corpus is all binary adjectives, and one of the complementary words must be guided by a preposition, so it is a quasi-binary adjective. The cooperative mode can be divided into a complete form and an omitted form. There are two types of complete forms: "NP1 + preposition + NP2+___" and "preposition + NP2 + NP1+___". Prepositions include "對 (to)", "向 (to)", "因 (cause)". For example:

1) 我對那件事感到抱歉

I just feel a little sorry for that lady.

2) 我對那件事感到抱歉

Florence feels distressed about this.

3) 我對那件事感到抱歉

I'm truly taking liberties with you.

4) 我對那件事感到抱歉

It may be understood that this is a little expression of my guilt for accidentally killing your friend.

5) 我對那件事感到抱歉

Everyone is very disturbed by the changes in the situation.

6) 我對那件事感到抱歉

I apologize for this.

7) 我對那件事感到抱歉

We also deeply regret this matter.

The category of the omitted form includes all complete omissions and partial omissions, and the cooperative mode of all omitted forms is "(under a certain context)___", for example:

8) 我對那件事感到抱歉 (A對B說, B對A說)

I apologize. (A did something that hurt B, what A said to B after calming down)

9) 对不起(A对B说了对不起, A对B说了对不起)

Take the liberty to disturb. (A wants to ask B's help, what A said to B)

The cooperative mode of partial omission is "(under a certain context) NP1+ ___", omitting the preposition and NP2, for example:

10) 对不起(A对B说了对不起)

Both people feel very guilty. (A and B's inner thoughts after the quarrel)

11) 对不起(A对B说了对不起)

He was very disturbed. (A has done something wrong)

12) 对不起(A对B说了对不起)

I am very ashamed. (A's lie was seen through)

Similarly, the complete form could also be expanded to:

13) A对B: "对不起"

A said to B: "I am sorry for my behavior."

14) A对B: "对不起"

A said to B: "I'm truly taking liberties with you."

15) A对B: "对不起"

The inner thoughts of A and B: "Both of them feel very guilty about the quarrel."

16) A对B: "对不起"

A's status: "A is upset because of what he has done wrong."

17) A: "对不起"

A said, "I am very ashamed because my lie was seen through."

The cooperative mode of nominal apology words

Nominal apology words also involve two arguments in the semantic relationship and belong to bivalent nouns. The complete cooperative mode is the frame structure "NP1 + preposition + NP2 + verb+___" or "preposition + NP2 + NP1 + verb+___".

Prepositions include "对 (to)", "为 (for)", "因 (for)". For example,

1) 对不起

You want to apologize to the group leader.

2) 对不起

I always trouble others.

3) 对不起, 对不起

I do not know this at all, and I sincerely apologize for it.

The omitted cooperative mode uses the frame structure "preposition + NP2 + verb+___", and the argument NP1 is omitted, for example:

4) 对不起, 对不起, 对不起

Sorry, Miss, for causing you so much trouble.

According to the context, it can be expanded to:

5) 妈妈, 对不起, 我们给您惹了那么多麻烦

Sorry, Miss, we have caused you so much trouble.

Second Language Acquisition Of Chinese Apology Words

From the above analysis of the meaning and usage of apology words, it can be seen that every Chinese apology word could be used as a construction. The process of acquiring it is how learners build a library of apology words psychologically through cognition. In this process, learners need to understand the different meanings of various apology words and obtain the cognitive awareness of the cooperative mode of apology words. This awareness of the grasp and application of apology words in the acquisition process is called "construction awareness" by Shi (2011), which is mainly reflected in the "coordination awareness" of apology words. The externalized expression of "coordination awareness" is the output of the learner. Therefore, the learner's process of mastering the "coordination awareness" of the construction of apology words could be recognized by examining the output.

Errors in verbal apology words

Among the errors in verbal apology words, there are four types in the quasi-binary targeted verbs: wrong cooperative mode selection, out-of-order coordination components, incomplete coordination components, and misuse of coordination components. The wrong cooperative mode selection means that the non-framed construction "NP1+___+NP2" should have been selected, but other coordination forms were misused. The out-of-order coordination components mean that the position of the coordination sentence components is wrong. Incomplete coordination components refer to the lack and omission of coordination components. Misuse of the coordination component refers to the wrong choice of the coordination component. For example,

1. *妈妈, 对不起 (I apologize to my mother.)
2. *对不起你 (I apologize to you.)
3. *对不起, 很遗憾 (We regret what happened.)
4. *我很愧疚因为我投诉 (I feel guilty for my complaints.)
5. *很抱歉 (I sincerely apologize to you.)

Example (1) is an error in the cooperative mode selection. "对不起 (apologize)" is a quasi-binary targeted verb, but the learner misuses the framed cooperative mode instead of the non-framed one. Example (2) belongs to the out-of-order coordination components, and the argument NP2 guided by the preposition should be placed before the words of apology. Examples (3) and (4) are incomplete coordination components and lack the propositions "因为 (for)" or "由于 (for)". Example (5) belongs to the misuse of coordination components, that is, the misuse of prepositions.

There are three types of errors in the true binary targeted verbs: incorrect cooperative mode selection, incomplete coordination component, and out-of-order coordination component. For example,

6. *很抱歉, 很遗憾 (I should have written to you at that time, but I did not write, I am sorry.)
7. *很抱歉 (However, she also feels sorry towards me.)
8. *很抱歉, 请理解 (I feel so sorry, please understand.)
9. *我的室友是研究生, 她经常帮我写论文, 所以我很抱歉 (My roommate is a graduate student. She is writing a thesis, but she often helps me with my studies, so I'm sorry.)

10. *吸烟有害健康, 在公共场所吸烟是不好的 (Smoking is not good for one's health, and smoking in public places is something that others should be sorry for.)

Since the learners do not grasp that "抱歉 (sorry)" should be the true binary targeted verb, the cooperative modes in Example (6) and Example (7) are both misused as framed coordinations instead. Prepositions are used to guide arguments, which proves that learners do not understand and are uncertain of the cooperative modes of the apology word. In Example (8) and Example (9), the learner's choice of cooperative mode is correct, but it ignores the fact that the agents in the omitted form of the true binary targeted verbs can be ignored, but the objects cannot. Therefore, the cooperative mode is incomplete. The cooperative mode of Example (10) is also correct, but there is a problem with the order of the components.

Errors with adjective apology words

The errors in adjective apology words are mainly with the use of binary adjectives, including three types: cooperative mode selection error, out-of-order coordination components, and incomplete coordination components. For example,

1. *我很抱歉 (I am sorry to you)
2. *他很抱歉 (So he is guilty.)
3. *妈妈很抱歉 (Mom regrets it.)
4. *我很抱歉他 (That is why I feel guilty about him.)
5. *我很抱歉吸烟 (I'm sorry about the smoking.)
6. *抱歉! (I am sorry.)

Examples (1) and (3) are cooperative mode selection errors. The framed coordination component should be used instead of the non-framed coordination component. Example (4) belongs to the incomplete coordination category and lacks an object. Examples (5) and (6) belong to the wrong order of the coordination components. Example (5) should put the preposition and its leading arguments before the apology word. The position of the coordination component in Example (6) should be interchanged with "抱歉 (I'm sorry)".

Errors with nominal apology words

The errors made with nominal apology words include two types: cooperative mode selection errors and incomplete coordination components. For example,

1. *我很抱歉 (I apologize to you.)
2. *他们很抱歉 (They think that they have not caused others trouble.)
3. *不要麻烦别人 (Do not bother others.)
4. *我经常给你麻烦 (I often give you some trouble.)

Examples (1) to (3) are errors in the cooperative mode selection. Framed coordination should have been selected, but non-framed coordination was misused. Example (4) belongs to the incomplete coordination component, that is, the verb is missing, and the verb "加 (add)" should be added to form "加麻烦 (to add trouble)".

Correct output of verbs, adjectives, and nominal apology words

The correct output situation includes choosing the correct cooperative mode, ensuring the coordination component is not incomplete or misused, and verifying the coordination component sequence is correct. The correct use cases of verbal apology words are divided into true binary targeted verbs and quasi-binary targeted verbs. The first 10 are the true binary targeted verbs in the following corpus, and the last 5 are the quasi-binary targeted verbs. Examples (1) to (6) are complete coordination forms, and Examples (7) to (15) are omitted coordination forms.

1) 对不起

I feel very sorry towards my parents.

2) 对不起, 对不起

However, these are the words in my heart. Please forgive me.

3) 对不起

I feel that I have failed my parents' expectations of me.

4) 对不起

Please forgive me.

5) 对不起, 对不起

Never use an overbearing attitude toward juniors so as not to make them regret our mistakes.

6) 对不起

We apologize for the confusion.

7) 对不起, 对不起

I am sorry to interrupt his work.

8) 对不起

Sorry.

9) 对不起

Now recalling the past, I feel that I have failed my father's expectations of me.

10) 对不起

Please forgive me.

11) 对不起

Excuse me.

12) 对不起, 对不起

I truly do not have time to write a letter; I hope my parents will understand.

13) 对不起, 对不起

When encountering setbacks, I start to blame myself.

14) 对不起, 对不起

I apologize for you, and I regret it.

15) 对不起

I have always blamed myself.

The correct output of adjective apology words and nominal apology words are as follows. Among them, examples (16) to (20) are complete coordination forms, and examples (21) to (24) are omitted coordination forms.

16) 对不起

Many older adults feel very disturbed by this reality.

17) 对不起, 对不起

As a smoker, I am very ashamed of this.

18) 我对这些人感到深深的遗憾。

I can only feel deep regret towards these people.

19) 我为这个错误道歉。

I apologize for this error.

20) 我当时很内疚, 我太过分了。

I was guilty at that time; I was too much.

21) 对不起。

Sorry.

22) 不过, 我错了。

However, I was wrong.

23) 我小时候, 给父母惹了很多麻烦。

When I was young, I caused much trouble for my parents.

In summary, learners have an orderly process for the acquisition of apology words. Learners need to continuously construct and improve the library of apology words to form a complete conscious construction to use them freely in communication.

The Internal Mechanism Of Chinese Apology Vocabulary Acquisition

Shi (2017) believes that the internal mechanism of acquisition determines the performance of learners' output. From the perspective of construction grammar, the internal acquisition mechanism behind the construction process of apology could be regarded as a kind of "coordination awareness." Descriptively, the correct output means that the learner has complete coordination awareness, while errors show the learner's incomplete grasp of coordination awareness, which could be refined into incorrect cooperative mode selection, out-of-order coordination components, incomplete coordination components, and misuse of coordination components. Among the four types, the first type of error reflects that the learner has not mastered the coordination form at all and does not have coordination awareness at all. The second and third errors reflect that learners have mastered the preliminary coordination form and have preliminary coordination awareness, but the awareness is relatively weak and not accurate enough. The fourth kind of error reflects that learners have mastered the basic coordination form and have basic coordination awareness, but there are still some minor problems in composition. It can be seen that the process of learners' acquisition of apology words is staged and hierarchical as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
The Acquisition Process of Apology Words

Stage	Level	Specific performance
Stage Ⅰ	lack of coordination awareness	wrong cooperative mode selection
	preliminary coordination awareness	out-of-order coordination components
		incomplete coordination components
	basic coordination awareness	misuse of coordination components
Stage Ⅱ	complete coordination awareness	correct outputs

Stage Ⅰ refers to the learner's error in the cooperative mode of apology words. The lack of coordination awareness at the first level means that learners have no awareness of the identity of apology words, which is the lowest level for acquiring the cooperative mode of apology words. However, at the same time, this is also the best time for learners to acquire the cooperative mode of apology words, and the acquisition potential is excellent. Its externalized performance is that learners often output

sentences with a lack of grammatical mastery at this stage. That is, framed coordination and non-framed coordination are mixed. The preliminary coordination awareness of the second level is formed based on the first level. This means that learners have been able to identify the apology words and are working hard to move closer to the correct cooperative mode. However, coordination awareness is still very vague. There are often hesitations or errors in the order of appearance and in the components. The third level of basic coordination awareness means that learners can recognize the identity of apology words and can select a cooperative mode accurately. At the same time, they are clear and familiar with whether the components appear in the cooperative mode and the order in which they appear. There are still biases in the choice. These biases will not significantly impact communication but can reflect the learner's insufficient grasp of such coordination components. It is a qualitative leap from stage I to stage II. When the learners reach stage II, they already have complete coordination awareness, can accurately identify the identity of apology words, choose the cooperative mode correctly, and understand the location, usage, and choice of the components. Therefore, the correct apology sentence can be output.

Conclusion

This paper examines the cooperative mode and second language acquisition of 26 apology words in eight Chinese-learning textbooks based on construction grammar theory. Chinese apology words can be divided into verbal, adjective and nominal according to their parts of speech. Their cooperative modes can be divided into framed and non-framed structures. Both complete forms and omitted forms are used. By comparing the correct and erroneous outputs of learners, it can be seen that the forms include incorrect cooperative mode selection, out-of-order coordination components, incomplete coordination components, and misuse of coordination components in the erroneous output. In the correct output, the learner can accurately identify the identity of the apology word, correctly choose the cooperative mode, and have a good understanding of the location, usage, and choice of the components. The error in the correct output process reflects the learner's acquisition process, dominated by "coordination awareness". The acquisition and mastery of "coordination awareness" are hierarchical and phased. Stage I includes three levels: lack of coordination awareness, preliminary coordination awareness, and basic coordination awareness. Stage II means that the learner has complete coordination awareness, which shows that the learner's acquisition of apology words is not accomplished overnight but is staged.

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Authors' contributions

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