

# A Cognitive-Grammatical Study of “我家住NL” and “我家住在NL”

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This paper is based on usage-based theory in cognitive grammar. Usage-based theory is proposed by Tomasello. Usage-event-based models of language focus on the specific communicative activities by which people learn and use language. We found that the NL in the phrase “我家住NL” is generally smaller in scope and refers to a more ambiguous place, while NL can also refer to time. In contrast, the NL in “我家住在NL” can refer to both larger and smaller locations, and the NL in this construction can also refer to a detailed location, which means that “我家住在NL” is more commonly used when expressing a detailed address.

*Keywords:* “我家住NL” and “我家住在NL”, usage event theory, cognitive grammar

## Introduction

The verb “住” (live) in Chinese is frequently used in people’s daily conversation. It means to stay for a long time or to rest for a short time, and the corresponding English words are “reside, live at, live in, dwell”. When you type “我家住” on the CCL website, there are a total of 146 phrases, including 51 phrases for “我家住NL” and 18 phrases for “我家住在NL”. In Chinese, the verb “住” (live) can be followed by a non-objective object to express being in a certain place.

Cognitive grammar considers language to be symbolic in nature, a means of practicing phonological and semantic structures. In cognitive grammar, meaning is equivalent to conceptualization, and Langacker (2005) proposes that language is usage-based, that is, linguistic knowledge is an abstract generalization of various usage events, and that cognitive linguistics is particularly concerned with the concrete use of language systems and the usage knowledge acquired by language users.

## Theoretical Foundation

Usage-based events, proposed by Langacker to address the problem of syntactic constructions and semantic-pragmatic connections, emphasize the inseparability of semantics and syntax, but also the fact that language comes from practice. Language knowledge comes from the practice of language use, and language knowledge is essentially knowledge about how language is used, so language research should focus on the process of experimental use rather than on the knowledge of language systems (Langacker, 2005). This is similar to drawing a picture from a cat and adapting the structure of the discourse to the context in which it is constructed, thus making a discourse construction (Tomasello, 2001). When people use linguistic symbols to

communicate, patterns of language use emerge and integrate into grammatical constructions as the frequency of use increases (Shang, 2014).

In Chinese, the grammatical constructions of “住在NL” and “住NL” are considered by most scholars to be “V + O” structures, while the preposition “在” is a phenomenon of prepositional shedding in the process of language development. According to usage-based theory, each syntactic construction has its corresponding semantic difference. In teaching Chinese as a foreign language, that is, the first person is used in both constructions, “My family lives in NL” and “My family lives in NL”. The current problem is the division of the meaning of the declarative sentence “我家住NL” and “家住在NL” in the first person in specific language use.

### **Syntactic Features of “我家住NL” and “家住在NL”**

#### **Characteristics of NL in “My Family Lives in NL” and “My Family Lives in NL”**

There are 18 items in the construct “I live in NL”; 16 of them refer to the place and two refer to the time. The most frequent one is the first floor, followed by a neighborhood or a village. For example:

(1) 我家住六楼。

Wo jia zhu liu lou.

My house is on the sixth floor.

(2) 我家住南湖边。

Wo jia zhu nan hu bian.

My family live beside the Nanhu Lake.

(3) 我家住清华园。

Wo jia zhu qing hua yuan.

My family live in the Tsinghua Park.

(4) 到我家住几天。

Dao wo jia zhu ji tian

Come and live in my home for several days!

From a spatial perspective, “NL” in “我家住NL” refers to a relatively small area. For example, “六楼”, “南湖边”, and “清华园”, these places are relatively small in scope, and when the speaker uses such sentences, he or she can roughly say where his or her home is, but without being specific about it. From the point of view of detail or not, “NL” refers to a rather vague location. In this construction, the speaker is not trying to express a specific location, not to express an address through the construction “我家住NL”, but only to indicate an abstract place. For example, the phrase “我家住在南湖边” is used in the corpus in the context that the speaker is recalling something from the past.

There are 51 phrases in the construction “我家住NL”, and “NL” refers to the place in all 51 phrases.

(5) 我家住在杭州。

Wo jia zhu zai hang zhou.

My family live in Hangzhou.

(6) 我家住在光明里六号。

Wo jia zhu zai guang ming li liu hao.

My family live in Number 6 at Guangming Street.

From the spatial dimension, “NL” in “我家住在NL” can be either a wide range of locations (e.g., Example 5) or a small range of locations (e.g., Example 6). “杭州 Hangzhou” is very large in terms of

geographical scope, and the speaker is generally not in this location in the sentence when making such an expression. “光明里六号” is a relatively detailed location, when introducing it to the listener. In terms of detail, this “NL” refers to the exact location that the speaker wants to express to the listener. Compare this with “我家住在花园小区3栋504室”, which means that the speaker wants to convey a specific address to the listener. In terms of the temporal dimension, “NL” refers to the location where the speaker currently lives.

### The Difference Between “我家住NL” and “我家住在 NL” in Terms of Discourse Expression

From the corpus entries, when the author constructs “我家住 NL”, some of the characteristics of a residence itself are used to set the atmosphere of the whole sentence or even the whole article, which is more conducive to portraying a certain character and expressing a certain emotion. In the construction of “我家住在 NL”, the creator usually wants to express that his home is in a certain place, so that the discourse bearer knows a specific location. In contrast, the appearance of the location in Example (8) is only to show where the place is, while the “remote countryside” in Example (9) is a metaphor to express the main character’s poor family and powerlessness, thus showing the fairness and impartiality of the Civil Affairs Bureau.

(7) 我家住农村，在县城工作。

Wo jia zhu nong cun, zai xian cheng gong zuo.

My family live in village and I work in a county.

(8) 我家住在离县城不远的西泰贝村，我们脚下的这条通往西泰贝村的砾石公路连……

Wo jia zhu zai li xian cheng bu yuan de xi tai bei cun, wo men jiao xia de zhe tiao tong wang xi tai bei cun de li shi gong lu lain.

My family live in Xitaipei Village that is not far from the county. The sand-and-stone road we stand on extends to Xitaipei Village, which connects with ...

(9) 我家住偏僻农村，又没有任何关系，没给民政局领导递过一支烟，敬过一杯酒，我能到农行工作，全靠民政局风气好啊！

Wo jia zhu pian pi nong cun, you mei you ren he guan xi, mei gei min zhen ju ling dao di guo yi zhi yan, jing guo yi bei jiu, wo neng dao nong hang gong zuo, quan kao min zhen ju feng qi hao a!

Even though my family live in remote countryside, I get a job on Agricultural Bank which is all because of the impartiality of Civil Affairs Bureau.

The phrase “我家住NL” is more colloquial than “我家住在NL”, which is used in some literary works to emphasize the character’s image, while in more formal written expressions, “我家住在” is usually used.

### Conclusion

This paper analyzed the difference in usage between “我家住NL” and “我家住在NL” from the perspective of usage-based theory by studying 69 corpora on CCL, so as to help Chinese second language learners better differentiate the usage and reduce the barriers to learning Chinese. This study combines the usage-based theory of cognitive grammar with the learning of Chinese by second language learners in order to provide a new way of thinking for the study of Chinese language learning and promotion. However, the examples cited are limited, and more examples are needed to analyze the generality of the study.

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