

Gei and the double object construction in Mandarin Chinese
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Proposal

This paper proposes that in Mandarin double object construction (DOC), *gei* is an overt realization of Harley (2002)'s possessive P_{HAVE} head (1a). It raises to join the predicate to form the verb, no matter whether the predicate is null or not. This proposal also gives a unified account of why *gei* sometimes acts as a verb and sometimes as a preposition.

- (1) a. [_{VP} Agent [_v cause/∅ [_{PP} Goal [_P P_{HAVE} (*gei*) [_{DP} Theme]]]]]
b. [_{VP} Agent [_v cause [_{PP} Theme [_P P_{LOC} [_{PP} *gei* Goal]]]]]

Background

Harley introduces two null P heads P_{HAVE} / P_{LOC} to account for the DOC/dative alternation. Both P heads raise to the predicate to form the verb, and the difference between the two is realized by the different semantic meaning of the two heads: P_{HAVE} has possessive meaning while P_{LOC} has locative meaning.

- (2) a. [_{VP} Agent [_v cause [_{PP} Goal [_P P_{HAVE} [_{DP} Theme]]]]] John [sent [Mary [_t [a letter]]]]
b. [_{VP} Agent [_v cause [_{PP} Theme [_P P_{LOC} [_{PP} to Goal]]]]] John [sent [a letter [_t [to Mary]]]]

Mandarin Chinese also has the DOC/dative alternation. Furthermore, *gei* sometimes appears as a preposition (3b), equivalent to English *to*, but sometimes appears as a verb (4a), equivalent to English *give*.

- (3) a. Guge na *gei* Lailai yi-ge ping-guo. (4) a. Guge *gei* Lailai yi-ge ping-guo.
Guge take P_{HAVE} Lailai one-CL apple Guge give Lailai one-CL apple
'Guge brings Lailai an apple.' 'Guge gives Lailai an apple.'
b. Guge na yi-ge ping-guo *gei* Lailai. b. Guge *gei* yi-ge ping-guo *gei* Lailai.
Guge take one-CL apple to Lailai Guge give one-CL apple to Lailai
'Guge brings an apple to Lailai.' 'Guge gives an apple to Lailai.'

Evidence

Following Harley's proposal, *gei* being the P_{HAVE} head in the DOC gives a unified account for (3) and (4): *gei* is always a preposition (an abstract P head in the DOC, and an actual preposition equivalent to English *to* in dative construction). It incorporates the predicate to form the verb; when the predicate is null (4a), it still raises to *v* and form the verb with the meaning of *offer* and *give*.

Furthermore, P_{HAVE} *gei* in Mandarin also passes three diagnostics in Harley (2002). First, the DOC does not allow inanimate Goal arguments (Oehrle 1976). **Ta song-gei nong-chang hua-fei*. ('He sent to the farm the fertilizer.') is ungrammatical because P_{HAVE} head requires *nong-chang* 'the farm' to be a possessor and hence be animate, which it is not. Second, idioms of the DOC lose the idiomatic reading in their dative construction counterpart. While the DOC *Ta reng-gei wo yi-ge tang-shou-de shan-yu* has idiomatic reading 'He brought his trouble to me.', its dative counterpart only has literal meaning 'He threw a hot sweet potato to me'. Third, subtle semantic differences exist between two constructions. While (3a) indicates that Guge has already handed the apple to Lailai, its dative alternative (3b) entails the possibility that Guge is reaching out to the apple, but Lailai has not actually got it.

However, it would not be possible to get these semantic differences, if the two constructions were derived from the same underlying structure. Larson (1988) proposes that the DOC is derived from the dative construction. According to the *Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis* (Baker 1988), the two constructions share the same D-structure and hence it is impossible to derive different meanings.

This proposal is also compatible with Pytkänen (2008)'s low applicative structure, where the applicative head (i.e. *gei*) introduces the Theme. It is evident in (5) that *gei* can't be added without bringing an extra Theme argument *ta*.

- (5) Guge na-gei Lailai yi-ge ping-guo, yi-jing na-gei *(ta) liang-ci le.
Guge take P_{HAVE} Lailai one-CL apple already take P_{HAVE} him two-time PART
'Guge brings Lailai an apple, and has already brought him two times.'

Future Work

Paul and Whitman (2010) proposes *raising applicative* to account for Mandarin DOC. They argue that the applicative head *gei* is above the lexical VP. The V head raises to left-adjoin *gei*, and further raises to left-adjoin the Aspect head *-le*. It is still unclear how Aspect interacts with

the abstract P head/applicative head in the DOC. I raise several concerns about their analysis, and offer some discussion of the word order facts they raise.

Reference:

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