Mandarin GIVE-marked Benefactives and the Syntax and Semantics of Double Object Constructions

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Introduction: Since Pylkkänen's influential (2002; 2008) work on double object constructions (DOC) cross-linguistically, it has become standard to differentiate DOCs that realize a high applicative from those that realize a low applicative, each with distinct syntax and semantics. In this paper, I examine Mandarin Chinese (MC) GIVE-marked DOCs in light of Pylkkänen's typology and argue that they do not fit neatly into the proposed categories. Instead, I propose MC '*gei*' is a light verb denoting a bleached transfer event, in the spirit of Bruening's (2015) analysis of the English light verb '*give*'. I argue this analysis accounts for the observed properties of the GIVE-marked DOCs, and speculate on how the analysis can be extended to account for the similarly GIVE-marked prepositional dative construction (PDC).

MC Derived Ditransitives: The MC verb of giving '*gei*' '*give*' as a lexical verb takes two arguments, appearing in a DOC frame with the indirect object (IO) preceding the direct object (DO).

(1) Zhangsan **gei**-le   Lisi yi-ben   shu.
     Zhangsan GIVE-ASP Lisi one-CLS book
     'Zhangsan gave Lisi a book.'

However, '*gei*' is also used to derive ditransitive DOCs from transitive verbs. In such cases, it appears affixed to the main verb, and the indirect object introduced by '*gei*' precedes the DO. Omitting '*gei*' is impossible in these derived ditransitives.

(2) Zhangsan xie-***(gei)**-le   Lisi yi-feng xin.
     Zhangsan write-GIVE-ASP Lisi one-CLS letter
     'Zhangsan wrote Lisi a letter.'

Paul & Whitman (2010) show that in the V-*gei* construction, the IO introduced by *gei* is located outside the VP, exactly as in the high applicative structure of Pylkkänen (2008). Evidence for this comes from the distributive quantifier '*ge*' 'each', which Soh (2005) argues adjoins either to a vP or VP. The observation is that '*ge*' can intervene between the IO and DO in a V-*gei* DOC, diagnosing a VP boundary between them.

(3) Zhangsan xie-gei-le   tamen **ge**   yi-feng xin.
     Zhangsan write-GIVE-ASP them   each one-CLS letter
     'Zhangsan wrote each of them a letter.'

On the other hand, the V-*gei* construction also fails Pylkkänen's diagnostics for high applicatives. That is, *gei* cannot be affixed to unergative or stative verbs (Paul & Whitman 2010).

(4) *Zhangsan tiaowu-gei-le   Lisi.
     Zhangsan   dance-GIVE-ASP Lisi

(5) *Wo kan-gei-zhe   Mali bao ne,
     1SG watch-GIVE-DUR Mary bag PRT
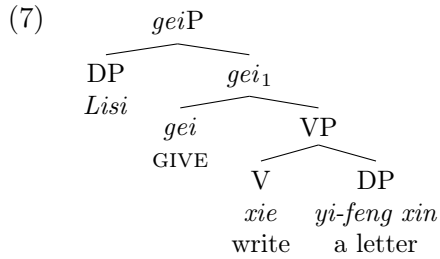   bu   neng likai.
     NEG can   leave

Pylkkänen's high-low applicative typology of DOC thus breaks down when considering the MC V-*gei* DOC. Syntactically, they seem to be located high above the VP, but semantically, they have the semantics of low applicatives in denoting a relation between two DP objects.

Proposal: Adapting from Bruening (2015), I propose that '*gei*' can either be a full lexical verb, or a semantically bleached verb. It is semantically bleached in the sense that its event description needs to be filled in by another event, while still denoting a general transfer event because of the *recipient* theta-role it introduces. Thus the bleached '*gei*' takes as its first argument a predicate of events of type $<s,t>$. The predicate of events, however, must include a DO, as the *recipient* theta-role enforces the condition that the recipient must potentially have an entity to receive (as in Jerro (2016)). This explains why the V-*gei* construction cannot combine with unergatives or statives (as in Pylkkänen's (2008) low applicatives).

(6) a. $[\![gei_v]\!]$: $\lambda x \lambda y \lambda e[give(e) \wedge theme(e,x) \wedge recipient(e,y)]$

b. $\llbracket gei_{bleached}\rrbracket$: $\lambda P_{<s,t>}\lambda x\lambda e[P(e) \wedge recipient(e,x)]$

The structure and semantics of the V-*gei* construction is shown below. The VP complement of *gei* provides the DP assigned a *theme* role that the DP assigned a *recipient* role receives. This is possible since '*gei*' denotes a bleached transfer event, which in the semantics is provided with an event description by the writing event (cf. Bruening (2015) for light verb '*give*' in English). Head movement of the main verb through '*gei*' derives the correct surface order.

(7)

(8) a. $\llbracket VP\rrbracket$: $\lambda e[write(e) \wedge theme(e,a\ letter)]$

b. $\llbracket gei_1\rrbracket$: $\lambda x\lambda e[write(e) \wedge theme(e,a\ letter) \wedge recipient(e,x)]$

c. $\llbracket geiP\rrbracket$: $\lambda e[write(e) \wedge theme(e,a\ letter) \wedge recipient(e,Lisi)]$

Predictions and Extensions: The proposed analysis preserves the insights of Soh (2005) and Paul & Whitman (2010) that the IO in the V-*gei* construction is located outside the VP and above the DO, explaining the distribution of quantifers like '*ge*'. In addition, the analysis predicts that the IO always scopes over the DO, and that the DP introduced by '*gei*' must always be animate due to the *recipient* theta-role, as only animate entities can be recipients (Biggs 2014).

(9) a. Wo dei jieshao-gei liang-ge laoshi mei-ge xuesheng.
1SG must introduce-GIVE two-CLS teacher every-CLS student
'I should introduce two teachers (to) every student.' (2>∀, *∀>2)

b. *Wo xie-gei-le Lundun yi-feng xin.
1SG write-GIVE-ASP London one-CLS letter
Intended: 'I wrote a letter to London.'

The proposed analysis also explains why the V-*gei* construction exhibits the semantics of a low applicative in Pylkkänen's typology. Rather than a high-low split, I suggested that the bleached verb '*gei*' introduces a *recipient* role, requiring an individual argument that can be received and which must be introduced by a transitive verbal complement. It is also possible that the MC PDC makes use of the same bleached verb '*gei*'. As Biggs (2014) notes, the PDC patterns with the V-*gei* construction in failing high applicative tests, and can only introduce an animate argument. I suggest then that the same bleached verb '*gei*' is involved in the MC PDC, but it combines with its second individual argument assigned a *recipient* role first before combining with the verbal predicate.

(10) *Zhangsan tiaowu-le gei Lisi.
Zhangsan dance-ASP GIVE Lisi

(11) *Wo xie-le yi-feng xin gei
1SG write-ASP one-CLS letter GIVE
Lundun.
London

(12) *Wo kan-zhe bao gei Mali ne,
1SG watch-DUR bag GIVE Mary PRT
bu neng likai.
NEG can leave

Finally, the proposal here has the potential to explain why cross-linguistically, the verb of giving seems to be used to mark ditransitive constructions, such as in Korean, Japanese, Thai, Malay, Vietnamese etc. (Iwasaki & Yap 1998; Tomioka & Kim 2017 a.o.). The analysis takes seriously the possibility of the lexical semantics of the verb of giving being co-opted to introduce additional arguments. In this case, the verb of giving is semantically bleached of its meaning in the event description, but retains (some of) its argument-introducing capabilities in the form of a *recipient* theta-role. It is possible that the same analysis can be given to other languages that also mark the DOC using the verb of giving, which I leave for future investigation.