Chinese Causative Constructions with *shi* and *ling*: A Cross-variety Perspective

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In line with recent development in Cognitive Sociolinguistics, this study aims to investigate the near-synonymous Chinese causative constructions with the two most commonly used markers, i.e. *shi* and *ling* from a cross-variety perspective. We address the following two questions: (1) What is the extent to which varieties of Chinese differ in the choice of analytical causative constructions; (2) What is the extent to which varieties of Chinese share factors that constrain the causative alternation?

Chinese analytical causative constructions, which involve seven different markers, have long attracted the attention of many grammarians. Yet the onomasiological choice of causative markers in Chinese and factors affecting the choice have not been well studied, with the exception of Yang (2016). At the same time, previous studies on Chinese causative constructions barely consider their lectal variation, which have been attested in studies on Dutch causatives (e.g. Levshina 2011) in the framework of Cognitive Sociolinguistics. Methodologically speaking, the traditional approach in research on Chinese causatives largely involves introspection or small-scale corpus-illustrated description. Yet the empirical tradition of Cognitive Sociolinguistics necessitates a usage-based and quantitative approach to the investigation of causative construction.

For the current study, we rest on the 'Tagged Chinese Gigaword Corpus' (Huang 2009), which is a newswire corpus containing texts in Mainland, Taiwan and Singapore Chinese. For a practical reason, we restrict ourselves to a subset of the corpus by selecting data in the year of 2003. All the observations with *shi* and *ling* are automatically retrieved from the subcorpus, and then they are manually checked to avoid spurious hits. Observations with the causative markers *shi* and *ling* are annotated for a number of semantic, synaptic, discursive and lectal variables (cf. Levshina 2011). Then, a logistic regression model is built with the above-mentioned variables as independent variables and the binary choice of markers as the response to estimate the effect of the factors that constrain the causative alternation.

The findings of this study will demonstrate that variation in Chinese causative construction is lectally stratified and is shaped by various semantic, cognitive, or functional factors. Given the fact that syntactic alternation in Chinese varieties is far less explored than that in European languages, this study not only serves as an important reference for studies on Chinese causatives, but also contributes to the discussion on language variation and change from a cross-variety perspective.

References

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