

## THE DITRANSITIVE AS RESULTATIVE IN CHINESE

Yuzhi Shi

(National University of Singapore; email: chsshiyz@nus.edu.sg)

This article aims to demonstrate that in the Chinese ditransitive construction the verb and the indirect object first combine to form an immediate constituent like a transitive resultative phrase and then have the patient noun—the direct object as their object. In other words, there are syntactic parallelisms between the ditransitive construction and resultative constructions in Chinese. This article aims to show that the typologically weird feature of the Chinese ditransitive results from two factors: (a) the ditransitive construction typically expresses a location change of the patient, a kind of resultative; (b) the ditransitive and the resultative share the same schema, and thus the ditransitive construction is subject to the analogization of the resultative construction that possesses more frequency and greater prominence. These findings are consistent with Hudson (1992) which claims that the direct object is the real object of the ditransitive construction in English. Also, our analysis provides further support for the tenet of Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001) claiming that every construction is language-specific because it is subject to the influence of the overall grammar. This Chinese case sheds light on the conclusion of Bybee (2013) that semantic structure is more basic than syntactic configuration in many cases, and hence semantics often overrides syntax.

All the ditransitive instances that express a *give* transfer (i.e. the movement of the patient from subject to indirect object)<sup>1</sup> can be transformed into the disposal construction whose predicates are typically a ‘verb + resultative’ phrase. Only the direction object (O<sub>d</sub>) can be moved to the preverbal position but the indirect object (O<sub>i</sub>) cannot, as illustrated in (1).

- (1) a. *Wǒ gěi-le tā yī-zhāng piào.*  
I give-PFV she one-CL ticket  
‘I gave her a ticket.’  
b. *Wǒ bǎ piào gěi-le tā.*  
I BA ticket give-PFV her  
‘I gave the ticket to her.’  
c. \**Wǒ bǎ tā gěi-le piào.*  
I BA she give-PFV ticket

In other cases, only the object of a transitive verb can be used in the preverbal position.

The present analysis shows that semantic relation is more essential, which often override syntactic structures. Any generalization of syntactic configuration cannot be solely based on word class, and the semantic relation between constituents must be taken into account in order to identify a syntactic structure. Also, there are no universal structures in human languages. The meanings and forms of constructions result from various factors, such as grammar systems, lexical systems, and even phonological systems, which may root in the contexts of the languages. The present analysis, we believe, will shed light on the usage-based model, too. It will be helpful in rethinking and developing theoretical linguistics in the near future.

**Keywords:** ditransitive construction; resultative construction; semantic structure; construction grammar; syntactic configuration

---

<sup>1</sup> The Chinese ditransitive construction can express two-way transfers: either from the subject to the indirect object or vice versa. This will be further discussed in what follows.