

The Word Order of the Ditransitive Construction with GEI Revisited

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This paper discusses the Modern Chinese ditransitive construction with GEI, its word order patterns, including verb types and thematic roles of verb arguments that associated with different patterns of the construction. The paper also traces the historic development of the Chinese ditransitive construction as described by Peyraube (1994). It tries to apply natural information flow, or more specifically, principles of identifiability hierarchy, and distance-marking correspondence, to account for the varied word order patterns of the Modern Chinese ditransitive construction with GEI, in contrast to its historical development.

1. Ditransitive Construction in Modern Mandarin Chinese

The ditransitive construction in Modern Chinese appears in four word order patterns. Among these patterns three contain 给 GEI. Previous studies (Zhu, 1979, 1984; Lu, 1980; Yu, 1983; Xu, 1994) have identified three possible distribution patterns for GEI in Modern Chinese: i. preverbal position; ii. postverbal position, GEI following the direct object (VOG); and iii. postverbal position, GEI preceding the direct object (VGO). The four double-object patterns are as follows:

Preverbal:	A.	给 – Oi – V – Od	(GOV)
Postverbal:	B.	V – Od – 给 – Oi	(VOG)
	C.	V – 给 – Oi – Od	(VGO)
Without 给:	D.	V – Oi – Od	(VO)

1.1 Verb Types and the Ditransitive Construction

Many Chinese linguists (Hu, 1960; Zhu, 1979; Peyraube, 1984; Li, 1986; Shen, 1992) adopt the categorization of three types of verbs occurring in the ditransitive construction. The three types are: verbs of giving; verbs of taking; and verbs of non-giving or non-taking. In Chinese, there is in fact one more type of verb, i.e., verbs of giving and taking (Cf. Zhu, 1979). Among the four types of verbs, some bear the functions of substance transference, instrument and manner, for example, most verbs of giving, verbs of giving and taking. Some do not bear these functions, for example, most verbs of non-giving or non-taking and verbs of taking. The following are some examples of the four types of verbs:

Type 1: Verbs of giving

- a. 寄, 送, 发, 扔, 捐献, 分配, 介绍
- b. 卖, 还, 交, 退, 付

Type 2: Verbs of taking

买, 收, 抢, 偷, 赚

Type 3: Verbs of non-giving or non-taking

- a. 写, 带, 拿
- b. 炒
- c. 唱, 洗, 问, 检查, 解释
- d. 吃, 喝, 用, 穿
- e. 留, 挑, 加, 摇, 抓

Type 4: Verbs of giving and taking

借, 分, 租, 换, 找 (*give change*)

1.2 Thematic Roles Of The Verb Arguments

Mandarin Double-object structure with GEI has three valencies, the subject and the two datives. These three valencies may involve several thematic roles: agent, source, benefactive, goal, recipient, and patient. The role for the direct object is simple, which is always one and the same, i.e. patient. However, roles for the subject and for the indirect object are more complicated. Each valency may have just one role. For example, the subject is usually the agent. The indirect object can have the role of benefactive or goal. However, sometimes a valency may play two roles at the same time. For example, the subject can be agent and source. The indirect object can be benefactive and goal; sometimes it may have the role of benefactive and source at the same time.

Subject: agent, source

Agent only:

1. 医生给她检查身体。
2. 老板给他卖了三本书。
3. 我给小刘租了一间房子。

Agent and source:

4. 他给我喝了一杯酒。
5. 房东给她留了一把钥匙。
6. 爸爸给儿子付房租。

Direct object: patient

Indirect object: benefactive, source, goal/recipient

- Benefactive: 7. 医生给她检查身体。
 8. 老板给他卖了三本书。
- Goal/recipient: 9. 老板卖了三本书给他。
 10. 我租了一间房子给小刘。
- Benefactive and goal: 11. 我给小刘租了一间房子。
 12. 小张给他寄了一封信。
- Benefactive and source: 13. 老板给他卖了三本书。

Changes in number as well as in nature of roles affect the function of GEI, and the meaning of a sentence.

2. Word Order, Verb Types and Thematic Roles

As shown in section 1, the distribution patterns of ditransitive construction display different word orders with regard to GEI, direct and indirect object, and the verb. They all contribute to meanings of the sentences with double-objects.

2.1 The Coverb GEI

In English, distinctions are made between 'to' and 'for' in the following sentences:

14. He bought me a book.
15. He bought a book for me.

Sentence (14) means “he bought a book and give me the book me” while (15) means “he bought a book for some one else on behalf of me.” The relation between “to,” “for” and their objects is that “for” generally introduces a benefactive, and “to” an recipient, or a goal. In Chinese, both (14) and (15) can be put in one way using GEI:

16. 他给我买了一本书。

This shows that GEI has two semantic components “to” and “for,” each contributing to the function of GEI marking the role of goal and that of benefactive. An important difference between benefactive and goal lies in that there is no transference of things/substance from the subject to the indirect object involved when GEI marks the benefactive. When this is the case, the semantic component “to” is absent and the other one, “for,” becomes prominent. Either of the two components in GEI may become prominent. However, in some situations, the two roles may overlap and in such a case GEI may have both “to” and “for” readings.

Though in most cases, meanings can be clarified in contexts and appropriate interpretations can be rendered, and in Chinese there are other words that carry less or no ambiguity that can substitute GEI in its “for” meaning, for example, 替 “for,” 为 “for,” or in some dialects, 帮 “help,” (as in *Guiyang, Wuhan, Chongqing* in southwest Mandarin.). However, ambiguity may occur with preverbal GEI as example (16).

2.2 Distribution Situations of Verbs

All types of verb cannot enter all four patterns. Verbs of different types demonstrate the following distribution situations.

Preverbal: A. 给 – Oi – V – Od (GOV)

All four types of verbs can enter this structure and ambiguity may occur except for

- (a) type b in verbs of giving, i.e., verbs such as 卖, 还, 交, 退, 付;
- (b) verbs of giving and taking such as 借, 租, 分, 换; and
- (c) certain verbs of non-giving or non-taking such as 唱, 洗, 问, 检查, 解释.

With these verbs, GEI in preverbal position has only “for” reading and the indirect object has only the role of benefactive.

- 17. a 医生给他检查身体。
The doctor gave him a physical examination.
- *b 医生检查身体给他
- *c 医生检查给他身体
- *d 医生检查他身体

- 18. a 他给我们唱一首歌。
He sang a song for us.
- Or: *He sang a song to us.*
- *b 他唱一首歌给我们
- *c 他唱给我们一首歌
- *d 他唱我们一首歌

Postverbal: B. V – Od – 给 – Oi (VOG)

All four types of verb can enter this structure with exception of some verbs of non-giving or non-taking, for example, 唱, 洗, 问, 检查, 解释, 吃, 喝, 用, 穿, etc. (categories d and e in this verb type).

19. a 老板卖三本书给他。
 b 老板给他卖三本书。
 c 老板卖给他三本书。
 *d 老板卖他三本书
20. a 张三洗一个碗给李四。
 b 张三给李四洗一个碗。
 *c 张三洗给李四一个碗
 *d 张三洗李四一个碗
21. a 张三租一间房子给李四。
 b 张三给李四租一间房子。
 c 张三租给李四一间房子。
 ?d 张三租李四一间房子。
- 22.*a 张三喝一杯酒给李四
 b 张三给李四喝一杯酒。
 *c 张三喝给李四一杯酒
 *d 张三喝李四一杯酒

Postverbal: C. V – 给 – Oi – Od (VGO)

Verbs of taking (买, 收, 抢, 赚 etc.), and majority verbs of non-giving and non-taking (唱, 洗, 问, 检查, 解释, 吃, 喝, 用, 穿, etc. and as shown in 17c, 18c, 20c, 22a and c) cannot enter this structure. Others can (as in 19c and 21c).

23. *a 张三买给李四一本书
 b 张三给李四买一本书。
 c 张三买一本书给李四。
 ?d 张三买李四一本书。

With double-object structure **without 给**, D. **V-Oi-Od(VO)**, certain verbs belonging to verbs of giving, and verbs of giving and taking are allowed to enter. These include verbs such as 送, 借, 欠, 找 (*give change*), 问, 告诉, 答应, 招待 etc. Verbs of taking, and verbs of non-giving or non-taking (唱, 洗, 问, 检查, 解释, 吃, 喝, 用, 穿, etc) cannot enter this structure. Ambiguities are possible with verbs of giving and taking as shown in (24).

24. 张三送李四一本书。
25. 张三问/回答李四一个问题。
26. 张三借李四一本书。

Zhang San borrowed (or lent) Li Si a book.

2.3 Identifiability Hierarchy and Distance-Marking Correspondence

Natural information flow (or information structure) has been frequently discussed as an aspect of the influence of pragmatics on word order. Some researches (Lambrecht 1994, among others) have maintained that the major factor responsible for natural information flow and the relevant correlations is ‘identifiability’. Among factors that may be relevant to identifiability, the most obvious is animacy. Comrie (1979) found that objects higher in animacy use overt object case markers more frequently than those lower in animacy. It has been observed that in many languages, animacy affects word order. A unit higher in animacy precedes a unit lower in animacy.

Distance-marking correspondence as proposed by Lu (2004) states that the more a dependent is away from its head, the more it needs an overt marker indicating the semantic relation of the two units, which is motivated by a fundamental strategy of human cognition and is tested in Chinese as well as by cross-linguistic data. For instance, in Chinese, the adverbial marker 地 and the attributive marker 的 drop when the modifier and modified units have close semantic relation.

The two principles provide an explanation to the distribution situations of verb types with regard to the word order presented in the four double-object structures discussed (2.2).

Structure A. 给 – **Oi** – **V** – **Od** (GOV) is most adaptable to different types of verbs among the four patterns. Many verbs without connotation of transference can enter these structures. Structure A (GOV) has **Od** following **Oi** which is in conformity with identifiability hierarchy. It also is in conformity with distance-marking correspondence with **Oi**, the one higher in animacy, marked by GEI. However, this is the pattern with ambiguity possibility (though it is remediable by using other prepositions). Could it be because the pattern is too powerful, or use of the case marker GEI is not necessary since **Oi** is close to the verb?

Structure B. **V** – **Od** – 给 – **Oi** (VOG) is also adaptable to different types of verbs. This pattern is perfectly in conformity with both principles and since **Oi** is farther away from the verb than **Od**, the one lower in animacy, it needs to be marked. This pattern has no restriction or ambiguity.

Structure C. **V** – 给 – **Oi** – **Od** (VGO) has more restriction on verb types. C is also not in conformity with distance-marking correspondence principle. The direct object is away from its head without marking. Therefore only verbs that bear the functions of transference, instrument and manner can enter this structure.

Structure D. **V – Oi – Od** (VO) is inconformity with identifiability hierarchy. Like C., it also requires verbs with connotation of transference. However, the connotation of transference for many of verbs that can enter this structure is not exactly the same as those required by C. Oi in this structure can bear the role of recipient, goal, or patient. Thus the identifiability hierarchy of the two objects is not so clear.

3. Historical Development of Ditransitive Construction

We find it interesting to look at the historic development of the ditransitive construction and see accountability of the principles of identifiability hierarchy and distance-marking correspondence.

The written form GEI is not easily traceable in the history of the Chinese language. It is simply because there existed with a number of different written forms fitting in the same construction in the historic Chinese literatures, and the presence of GEI has not been found in a consistent or uninterrupted manner from available data. However, different patterns of ditransitive constructions are found in great quantity in literatures of the Pre-Qin period as well as in the oracle inscriptions. It is generally recognized that the following three patterns of the ditransitive construction are commonly used in Archaic Chinese.

- A. V + Oi + Od
27. 王賜晏子酒。
- B. V + Od + *yu* + Oi
28. 獻楚俘于王。
- C. V + Od + Oi
29. 范座獻書魏王。

Peyraube (1986) identifies another pattern of ditransitive constructions in this period:

- A. 以 + Od + V + Oi
30. 孔子以其兄之子妻之。

In addition to the above patterns, a structure with *yu* 與 ‘give’ as the first verb, meaning “for” is also found in some Pre-Qin literature. This may probably be the origin of the benefactive use of GEI in Modern Chinese.

31. 後若有事，吾與子圖之。

In the Han Dynasty, there emerged another pattern of ditransitive construction:

E. V1 + V2 (予/遺/與) + Oi + Od

The word that was predominantly used to introduce the indirect object in V2 position was *yu* ‘give’ which developed very rapidly since Han (Yang & He, 1992; Peyraube, 1986) with written forms including *yu* 予, *wei* 遺, etc.

32. 桌王孫不得已，分予文君僮百人。

From Later Han on, *yu* 與 gradually took the place of *yu* 予 and *wei* 遺 in the process of lexical unification (Peyraube, 1986).

33. 長者取刀度與法師。

After Song Dynasty, a few other words such as *kui* 饋 and *gui* 歸 are found co-existing with *yu* 與. However, sentence patterns remain unchanged.

34. 告總管借與我馬。

35. 卻討個生活歸您做。

36. 你做饋我一付護膝。

The structure with *yu* 與, *ji* 己 meaning “for,” preceding the main verb, is also found in the literatures from Song and Yuan periods.

37. 快己他做道袍子。

During Ming and Qing period GEI emerged and gradually replaced all the others (Yang & He, 1992). Structure patterns and uses in this period are similar to that in Modern Chinese. However, in *Xing Shi Yinyuan Zhuan* 《醒世姻緣傳》, *ji* 己 is found in all positions for GEI. This may be the record of a colloquial form in some dialects at that period (cf. Otatatsuo, 1956).

38. 怎麼公母兩個合夥著拿出二兩銀來丟己人。

In *Honglou Meng* 《紅樓夢》, GEI 給 is found predominantly in the ditransitive construction. It occurs in the preverbal and postverbal positions, functioning the same as in Modern Chinese.

Preverbal:

39. 我給他帶了好東西來了。
40. 你想吃什麼，回來好給你送來的。

Postverbal:

41. 你們只管去，都交給我就是了。
42. 老太太那日竟叫人拿幾百錢給我。

In summary, identified ditransitive constructions that occurred up to the end of Song Dynasty include:

- A. V + Oi + Od
- B. V + Od + *yu* + Oi
- C. V + Od + Oi
- D. 以 + Od + V + Oi
- E. V1 + V2 (予/遺/與) + Oi + Od

The four patterns of Modern Chinese ditransitive construction (see Section 1) formed after Song Dynasty and the word GEI appeared during Ming and Qing period.

4. Comparison

It is interesting to compare the ditransitive construction word order patterns in modern Chinese with those in the history, and to find that two patterns V – Oi – Od, and V – Od – 給 – Oi (V – Od – 於 – Oi in history), exist throughout the history, while some other patterns, V – Od – Oi and 以 – Od – V – Oi (as double-object construction) no longer in existence. It seems to suggest that the two patterns have stable structures, which cannot be by accident. The fact that these two patterns have been continued to modern Chinese without word order change and that some other ditransitive construction patterns disappear or have limited use seem to support the accountability of the principle of identifiability hierarchy, and distance-marking correspondence.

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