

Mandarin *gěi* as an argument introducer: Thematic and expletive uses

INTRODUCTION The Mandarin Chinese particle *gěi* has been subject to intense morphosyntactic investigation, yet a consensus remains elusive about its exact categorial status and syntactico-semantic contribution. *Gěi* has been variously described as a (light) verb, a preposition, an applicative head, and a complementizer (see, among others, Huang & Ahrens 1999, Ting & Chang 2004, Her 2006, Paul & Whitman 2010, or Lin & Huang 2015). The lack of agreement on a correct analysis stems from *gěi*'s capacity to appear in a wide range of disparate constructions. In (1), *gěi* functions more or less analogously to the English ditransitive verb *give*. In the related construction in (2), *gěi* combines with the verb *sòng* 'send' to form a complex predicate. In (3), *gěi* introduces a goal; notably, the order theme-goal is inverted compared to (1) and (2). In (4), *gěi* appears preverbally, directly preceding a DP interpreted as the beneficiary of the event denoted by the *vP*. This paper contends that all these uses of *gěi* can be unified under a single account: in each case, *gěi* is argued to be the overt realization of a highly underspecified argument-introducing head (Wood & Marantz 2017 [W&M]). Crucially, it will be shown that such a characterization of *gěi* can offer a coherent explanation for the striking ambiguity of sentence (5), where either of the two preverbal arguments can assume the role of agent.

(1) Tā gěi wǒ yī běn shū. (2) Tā sòng-gěi wǒ yī běn shū.
 3SG GEI 1SG one CL book. 3SG send-GEI 1SG one CL book
 'S/he gave me a book.' 'S/he sent me a book.'

(3) Tā sòng yī běn shū gěi xuéxiào. (4) Tā gěi wǒ zuò fàn.
 3SG send one CL book GEI school 3SG GEI 1SG do food
 'S/he sent the book to the school.' 'S/he cooked for me.'

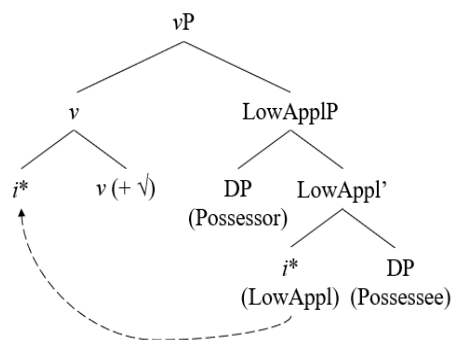
(5) Lǐ Sì gěi Xiǎo Wáng zhuāzhù le. (Adapted from Xu 1994: 122, (22))
 Li Si GEI Xiao Wang catch ASP
 'Li Si caught Xiao Wang (interpretation 1) / Li Si was caught by Xiao Wang (interpretation 2).'

BACKGROUND W&M subsume traditional categories like Voice, Appl, and *p* under the same argument-introducing head *i**. This head is highly underspecified in its semantics. Generally, *i** introduces a DP in the structure and gives it the interpretation implied by the element *i** has first merged with. For example, when *i** has an agentive *vP* as its complement, the DP it introduces will be interpreted as an agent. *i** can also have a root adjoined to it; in this case, the role assigned to the DP will be that implied by the semantics of the root. Finally, *i** can have an expletive use that merely serves to structurally license a DP; in this case, the DP will be successfully integrated into the semantic interpretation of the sentence if it can saturate a lower role which has remained unsaturated.

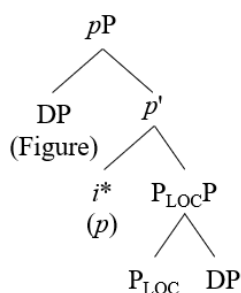
PROPOSAL *Gěi* is the overt realization of *i** in a series of disparate morphosyntactic contexts.

ANALYSIS The core idea behind the present proposal is that *gěi* consistently indicates the presence of an additional participant in the event. Let us begin by examining (1) and (2). I propose that, in these cases, *gěi* signals a possession relation in the structure. Following W&M, I assume that when *i** syntactically relates two DPs, its interpretation is that of a Low Applicative (Pylkkänen 2002, Cuervo 2003). In this case, *i** raises to *v* to adjoin to it and derive the correct word order. Little *v* itself can have a root adjoined to it, which will provide encyclopedic and phonetic content (2), or appear bare, in which case only *gěi* will be spelt out (1). The relevant structure appears in (6) [for the sake of expository ease, in the trees (6) through (8) below I retain traditional labels (see W&M for details)]. In (3), *gěi* realizes a *p* head introducing the DP *yī běn shū*, which receives a figure interpretation by virtue of *gěi*'s having a locative PP as its complement (see Jiang 2016 for the locative *vs.* possessive contrast between (1)/(2) and (3)). Little *p* is precisely the traditional label for *i** when it relates a DP to a PP. This is represented in (7). Lastly, (4) involves what is traditionally referred to as High Applicative (Pylkkänen 2002). The argument introduced by a High Applicative can receive different interpretations, beneficiary being a typical one. W&M argue that High Applicative is in fact *i** with a root adjoined to it merged right on top of a *vP*. The root determines the interpretation of the added argument. For convenience, I will refer to *i** adjoined to a root with beneficiary semantics as *i**_{FOR}. In the derivation of (4), once the beneficiary argument has been added to the structure, a further instance of *i** is merged on top that comes to be interpreted as active Voice and introduces the agent, *tā*. I assume that when two instances of *i** are merged on top of the *vP*, only the higher one ends up being pronounced as *gěi*, with the lower one remaining silent (alternatively, a morphophonological rule of haplology can delete one of the instances of *gěi* at PF; the specific mechanism is not crucial for this paper). The derivation for sentence (4) is captured by (8).

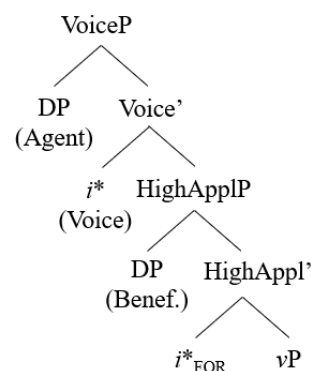
(6) Structure for (1) and (2)



(7) Structure for (3)

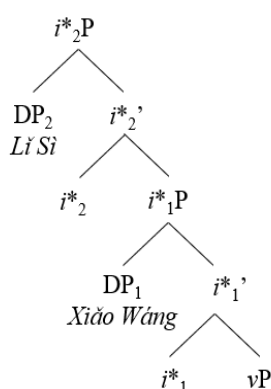


(8) Structure for (4)



Interestingly, the present proposal can also explain the ambiguity of sentence (5) without the need to posit the existence of distinct *gěi* heads in the lexicon. I claim that (5) involves an instance of expletive *i**. The ambiguity arises at the level of semantic calculation and is not structural or lexical. The gist of the proposal relies on the assumption that the theme role associated with the lexical core of the verb (*zhuānzhù* in sentence (5)) may not be immediately saturated. In this case, when the first instance of *i** is merged on top of the *vP*, it is eligible for two interpretations: it can either (i) have an expletive interpretation, in which case the introduced DP *Xiǎo Wáng* will integrate semantically by saturating the unsaturated theme role (interpretation 1), or (ii) have a thematic active Voice interpretation, in which case the DP will be interpreted as the agent of the event denoted by the *vP* (interpretation 2). When the second instance of *i** is merged, the interpretation of the higher DP, *Lǐ Sì*, will depend on the one that the lower argument has received: agent for interpretation 1 (*i** as thematic active Voice) and theme for interpretation 2 (expletive *i**). Crucially, this account deviates from W&M's stipulation that bare *i** closes off the extended projection of the verb when it merges directly on top of the *vP*. The tree structure for sentence (5) and the semantic calculation for the two interpretations are given in (9).

(9)

Interpretation 1:

$$\llbracket vP \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e [\text{CATCH}(e)(x)]; \quad \llbracket i^*_1 \rrbracket \leftrightarrow \lambda x.x \text{ (expletive)};$$

$$\llbracket i^*_1' \rrbracket = \llbracket vP \rrbracket; \quad \llbracket i^*_1P \rrbracket = \lambda e [\text{CATCH}(e)(\text{Xiao Wang})];$$

$$\llbracket i^*_2 \rrbracket = \lambda y \lambda e [\text{AGENT}(e)(y)] \text{ (thematic active Voice)};$$

$$\llbracket i^*_2' \rrbracket = \lambda y \lambda e [\text{AGENT}(e)(y) \ \& \ \text{CATCH}(e)(\text{Xiao Wang})];$$

$$\llbracket i^*_2P \rrbracket = \lambda e [\text{AGENT}(e)(\text{Li Si}) \ \& \ \text{CATCH}(e)(\text{Xiao Wang})].$$
Interpretation 2: $\llbracket vP \rrbracket = \lambda y \lambda e [\text{CATCH}(e)(y)]$

$$\llbracket i^*_1 \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e [\text{AGENT}(e)(x)] \text{ (thematic active Voice)};$$

$$\llbracket i^*_1' \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda y \lambda e [\text{AGENT}(e)(x) \ \& \ \text{CATCH}(e)(y)]$$

$$\llbracket i^*_1P \rrbracket = \lambda y \lambda e [\text{AGENT}(e)(\text{Xiao Wang}) \ \& \ \text{CATCH}(e)(y)]; \quad \llbracket i^*_2 \rrbracket \leftrightarrow \lambda x.x \text{ (expletive)};$$

$$\llbracket i^*_2' \rrbracket = \llbracket i^*_1P \rrbracket; \quad \llbracket i^*_2P \rrbracket = \lambda e [\text{AGENT}(e)(\text{Xiao Wang}) \ \& \ \text{CATCH}(e)(\text{Li Si})].$$

CONCLUSION The present work has argued that the Mandarin particle *gěi* can be analyzed as the overt realization of an abstract argument-introducing head. This analysis accounts for *gěi*'s diverse syntactic roles across various constructions: by proposing that *gěi*'s function is to introduce an additional participant in the event, we can explain its multiple uses without positing distinct lexical entries. Furthermore, by relying on a distinction between thematic and expletive uses of *gěi*, the present account also elucidates the problematic ambiguity observed in certain sentences where the order in which the agent and theme roles are saturated is reversible. All in all, this paper provides a novel and comprehensive solution to the long-standing debate on the morphosyntactic nature of *gěi*, contributing thus to our broader understanding of argument realization across languages.

SEL. REFS.: **Jiang (2016).** *Gěi* and the double object construction in Mandarin Chinese. • **Lin & Huang (2015).** Structures of the Mandarin *gěi* constructions. • **Wood & Marantz (2017).** The interpretation of external arguments. • **Xu (1994).** The status of marker *gěi* in Mandarin Chinese.