

The BEI Era and the Double Object Construction in Mandarin Chinese*

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In this paper I discuss the double object construction with the ditransitive verb *song* ('give') in Mandarin Chinese. In Liu (2006), the IO in the *song* double object construction without an additional *gei* ('GEO') following the verb has been shown to be unable to undergo passivization, which is achieved via the BEI construction in Mandarin Chinese. However, in the Google search, we can find examples showing possible IO movement. Consultants with native speakers also confirm this finding. I therefore discuss the possible factors for this new judgment from two different perspectives. The discussion shows that the possible/impossible IO movement in the *song* DOC should result from syntactic derivations, rather than a semantic requirement in the BEI construction.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I would like to discuss a very common double object construction in Mandarin Chinese. The double object construction contains the main verb *song* ('give'), which is highly used in our daily life and is usually considered a typical example to illustrate double object construction in Mandarin Chinese.

- (1) Zhangsan song-le Lisi yi-ben shu.
 Zhangsan give-ASP Lisi one-CL book
 'Zhangsan gave Lisi a book.'

In Li and Thompson (1981), they categorize ditransitive verbs into three subclasses. And their categorizing standard is to check whether an additional *gei* ('GEO') can follow the ditransitive verb in the construction. The verb *song* in (1) belong to their subclass in which the main verb can take an optional GEO in the construction, as illustrated in (2).

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- (2) Zhangsan song-(GEI)-le Lisi yi-ben shu.
 Zhangsan give-(GEI)-ASP Lisi one-CL book
 ‘Zhangsan gave Lisi a book.’

Since the additional GEI is optional in (2), intuitively the example in (2) can be paraphrased in (3) and (4) respectively. Example (3) is the *song* DOC without an additional GEI, while example (4) is the one with an additional GEI.

- (3) Zhangsan song-le Lisi yi-ben shu.
 Zhangsan give-ASP Lisi one-CL book
 ‘Zhangsan gave Lisi a book.’

- (4) Zhangsan song-GEI-le Lisi yi-ben shu.
 Zhangsan give-GEI-ASPLisi one-CL book
 ‘Zhangsan gave Lisi a book.’

In the following discussion, I would like to focus on example (3) where the ditransitive verb *song* (‘give’) is not followed by an additional GEI. For the ease of discussion, I will call examples like (3) as the *song* DOC without GEI. Essentially, I will show that there are interesting judgment differences of the *song* DOC without GEI and I try to explore the possible causes for this new phenomenon.

This paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, I will briefly review the IO and DO movement patterns of the *song* DOC without GEI in the literature. I then present a recent search result of the *song* DOC without GEI by Google in Section 3. In Section 4, I discuss the possible intervening factors which may influence the speakers’ judgments. I conclude the paper in the last section.

2. One Judgment

In this section I first present some investigation of the argument movement in the literature for the *song* DOC. Cross-linguistically, the A-movement patterns of the IO and the DO in the DOC have received great attentions. And it has been observed that language may differ in the movement patterns of the IO and the DO. For example, in English, the IO can be passivized, but the DO cannot, as shown in (5).

- (5) English
 a. John gave Mary a book.
 b. Mary was given the book. (IO)
 c. *The book was given Mary. (DO)

However, there are also languages which show the opposite movement pattern. In German, for instance, only the DO can move, but not the IO.

(6) German

- a. Das Mädchen schenkte dem Jungen ein Buch.
 The girl.NOM gave the boy.DAT a book.ACC
 ‘The girl gave the boy a book.’
- b. Ein Buch_i wurde dem Jungen von dem Mädchen t_i geschenkt.
 a book.NOM was the boy.DAT by the girl given
 ‘A book was given to the boy by the girl.’
- c. *Der Junge_i wurde t_i von dem Mädchen ein Buch geschenkt.
 the boy.NOM was by the girl a book given
 ‘The boy was given a book by the girl.’

(Woolford 1993: 688)

There are also languages which show symmetric movement patterns. That is, both the IO and the DO can undergo passivization. This is illustrated via the examples from Kinyarwanda in (7).

(7) Kinyarwanda

- a. Igitabo cy-a-haa-w-e umugore (n’umugabo).
 book SP-PAST-give-PASS-ASP woman (by-man)
 ‘The book was given to the woman by the man.’
- b. Umugore y-a-haa-w-e igitabo (n’umugabo).
 woman SP-PAST-give-PASS-ASP book (by-man)
 ‘The woman was given the book by the man.’

(Kimenyi 1980: 127)

Since there are such varieties across languages, one may wonder if Mandarin Chinese shows one of the movement patterns similar to any of the languages presented above. Indeed, in Liu (2006), she has investigated several constructions of DOC in Chinese, including the DOC without GEI. The verbs used in some of her examples include the verb *song* (‘give’), which happens to be our discussion focus here. The DOC without GEI in Liu (2006) shows the A’-movement patterns of the IO and the DO as cited in (8).¹

- (8) a. *Lisi bei ta song-le yi-ben shu. (IO)
 Lisi bei he give-ASP one-CL book
 ‘Lisi was given a book by him.’

¹ Note that the indefinite object NP has to become a definite one when becoming the subject. There is a definiteness/specificity requirement of subjects and topics in Mandarin Chinese (see Tsai 2001 and Hsin 2002). Hence the indefinite object NP is changed automatically into a definite/specific one when moving to the subject or topic position throughout this paper.

- b. Nei-ben shu bei ta song-le Lisi. (DO)
 that-CL book bei he give-give Lisi
 ‘That book was given to Lisi by him.’

(Liu (2006): 896, (80b,c))

As one can see, although the movement test done in (8) is A'-movement, it is also a kind of passivization, as shown in the English translation. In Mandarin Chinese, passivization is achieved via the BEI construction. Typical active examples and their passive counterparts are shown in (9). In the literature, the BEI construction has been argued to illustrate A- or A'-movement. According to Huang (1999), the BEI construction which involves A-movement is the one without the emergence of the Agent (the short passive) as in (9b), while the BEI construction involves A'-movement is the one with the emergence of the Agent (the long passive) as in (9c).

- (9) a. Zhangsan mai-zou-le yi-ben shu.
 Zhangsan buy-away-ASP one-CLbook
 ‘Zhangsan bought a book.’
 b. Zhe-ben shu bei mai-zou-le.
 This-CL book BEI buy-away-ASP
 ‘This book was bought.’
 c. Zhe-ben shu bei Zhangsan mai-zou-le.
 This-CLbook BEI Zhangsan buy-away-ASP
 ‘This book was bought by Zhangsan.’

In example (8) we have seen the presence of the Agent, hence this kind of passivization is considered an A'-movement test.

The A-movement pattern of the IO and the DO arguments is not discussed in Liu (2006). Therefore I tried to ask some native speakers who share the same A'-movement judgment as in Liu (2006). For the A-movement pattern, these speakers show exactly the same pattern as the A'-movement passive. That is, only the DO can undergo passivization, while the IO is immobile.

- (10) a. *Lisi bei song-le yi-ben shu. (IO)
 Lisi bei give-ASP one-CL book
 ‘Lisi was given a book by him.’
 b. Nei-ben shu bei ta song-le Lisi. (DO)
 that-CL book bei he give-give Lisi
 ‘That book was given to Lisi by him.’

Hence we may conclude that the argument movement pattern in the *song* DOC is similar to the one observed in English, in which there is movement asymmetry. And the asymmetry is that the IO is immobile, while the DO is movable.

3. Another Judgment

Recently, I have encountered some new judgments regarding the *song* DOC in Mandarin Chinese. While examining Liu (2006), one of the consultants told me that he can accept the ungrammatical (8a). After asking several other speakers, some of them also share the same judgment as this consultant. In other words, there are some people who can accept IO passivization as well as DO passivization, as shown in (11).

- (11) a. Lisi bei ta song-le yi-ben shu. (IO)
 Lisi bei he give-ASP one-CL book
 ‘Lisi was given a book by him.’
 b. Nei-ben shu bei ta song-le Lisi. (DO)
 that-CL book bei he give-give Lisi
 ‘That book was given to Lisi by him.’

Note that the passivization in (11) is A'-movement since there are Agents in the sentences. For the A-movement pattern, these speakers who can have IO A'-movement also can accept IO A-movement. This is shown in (12).

- (12) a. Lisi bei song-le yi-ben shu. (IO)
 Lisi bei give-ASP one-CL book
 ‘Lisi was given a book by him.’
 b. Nei-ben shu bei ta song-le Lisi. (DO)
 that-CL book bei he give-give Lisi
 ‘That book was given to Lisi by him.’

In addition to the consultations with native speakers, I have also done a Google search. Due to the search limitation, I tried to find the possible A-movement cases for the IO of the *song* DOC without GEI. Interestingly, I did find some examples which illustrate IO passivization, as shown in (13) and (14).²

- (13) Weilian wangzi zai dao-guo bei song-le
 William prince at island-country BEI give-ASP
 sheme qipa dongxi?
 what unusual thing
 ‘What unusual thing was given to Prince William in this island country?’

² The two Google examples were retrieved from Google search in August, 2017.

- (14) Mai-fang ni bei song mianji le ma?
 buy-house you BEI give floor-space ASP Q
 ‘When buying the house, were you given some floor space?’

In (13), we can see that the IO *Prince William* was given something as a gift when he visited a certain island country, and the passive sentence is used to show ask what he was given in that event. Example (14) also shows a similar situation, in which the IO *you* undergoes passivization in the *song* DOC without GEI. Note that there is a topic VP preceding the passivized IO.

Therefore, we do see that there are some speakers who can accept IO movement in the *song* DOC without GEI. This is quite an interesting contrast when we compare the current findings to the speakers who share the same judgment as Liu (2006). That is, there are also speakers who do not allow IO movement in the *song* DOC without GEI.

4. The Cause

Since there are two different judgments, one may be curious to see what the causes are beyond. The first possible cause that came to my mind is the semantic influence of passivization.

Recall that the passivization employed in Chinese is the BEI construction. The BEI construction, as well-known in the literature, has a semantic requirement on its subject. That is, something bad has to happen on the subjects of the passives. In other words, there has to be some adversative reading imposed on the subjects. As shown in (15), the passive counterpart of (15a) in (15b) is well-perceived since Lisi was a victim being beaten by Zhangsan.

- (15) a. Zhangsan da-le Lisi.
 Zhangsan beat-ASP Lisi
 ‘Zhangsan beat Lisi.’
 b. Lisi bei Zhangsan da-le.
 Lisi BEI Zhangsan beat-ASP
 ‘Lisi was beaten by Zhangsan.’

However, once the verb is changed into a positive one like the one in (16a), its passive counterpart is unacceptable. *Lisi* functions as a beneficiary in (16b), which does not fulfill the requirement of the passives. Compared (16b) to (15b), the only difference lies in the meaning of the verb. Since there is no structural difference, the adversity requirement is the cause of the ungrammaticality of sentence (16b).

- (16) a. Zhangsan ai-guo Lisi.
 Zhangsan love-ASP Lisi
 ‘Zhangsan used to love Lisi.’

- b. *Lisi bei Lisi ai-guo.
 Lisi BEI Lisi love-ASP
 ‘Lisi used to be loved by Zhangsan.’

In addition, the adversity requirement recently plays an important role in forming a new type of Mandarin passive. This is known as the rise of the BEI Era. For passive constructions, it is required that the verb in its active counterpart is transitive or ditransitive so that the internal argument can be passivized and becomes the subject of the passive construction. However, this requirement has been violated recently. In Mainland China, starting around 2008, examples like (17a) or (17b) began to emerge in the internet texts. One salient characteristic of these examples is that the verbs of the relevant examples are intransitive.

- (17) a. Zhangsan zuotian bei zisha-le.
 Zhangsan yesterday bei suicide-ASP
 ‘Zhangsan was forced to commit suicide yesterday.’
 b. Zhangsan bei shizong-le.
 Zhangsan bei missing-ASP
 ‘Zhangsan was forced to be missing.’

As observed in Xie (2016), these kinds of passives in (17) both impose a heavy adversative reading on the subject. Moreover, the subject has to perform the actions denoted by the verb unwillingly. For instance, in (17a), the reading is that *Zhangsan* was forced to commit suicide and this was against his will. Compared to typical passives, although adversative subject is not an absolute requirement, it becomes an essential component in this newly-formed passive construction.

However, it has been reported that the adversity reading on the subject is not an absolute semantic requirement for passives. According to the survey in the corpora, the adversity requirement on the subject is around 50% to 70% (i.e. McEnery *et al.* 2003 & Xiao *et al.* 2006). And Chao (1968) has proposed that the requirement declines a lot because of the influence of western languages such as English. As shown in (18), the passive English sentence in (18a) was translated into a BEI construction counterpart in (18b) directly. However, a better translation should be the one in (18c) which employs the *shi...de* construction.

- (18) a. This novel was written by my mother.
 b. *Zhe-ben xiaoshuo bei wo muqin xie-le.
 this-CL novel BEI I mother write-ASP
 c. Zhe-ben xiaoshuo shi wo muqin xie-de.
 this-CL novel be I mother write-DE

If we view the adversity requirement as a scale, it seems that there are speakers who move to one end of the scale, in which the intransitive passives of the BEI Era are formed because of the heavy adversative reading on the subjects. On the opposite end of the scale, there are also speakers who have lessened their adversity requirement on the passive subjects. Hence one possible reason why there are speakers who can accept IO passivization in the *song* DOC is that these speakers do not have strong adversity requirement on the passive subjects as other speakers.

If we examine the sentence in question again, repeated here in (19), it is quite possible that the sentence will be judged ungrammatical under the adversity requirement on the subject. The verb *song* ('give') usually denotes something good given as a present from the sender to the receiver. As a result, the object NP *Lisi* is interpreted as a beneficiary in (19). When the object NP becomes the subject NP in (19), there will be a semantic conflict consequently. However, if some speakers have a looser adversity requirement, these speakers may not have this kind of semantic conflict and judge the sentence as grammatical.

- (19) (*)Lisi bei song-le yi-ben shu. (IO)
 Lisi bei give-ASP one-CL book
 'Lisi was given a book by him.'

To test this possible cause for different judgment, one way is to eliminate the semantic influence and retest the movement results for these two groups of speakers. There are A'-movement and A-movement patterns which need to be reexamined. For the A-movement, a well-known construction is the BA construction. However, this construction is probably not a good candidate to test the A-movement pattern of the IO in the *song* DOC without GEI since the BA construction also imposes some affective or disposal reading on the moved object. For example, it is possible to prepose the object from (20b) to (20a), but the preposing of the object NP is not allowed from (21b) to (21a). This is because the stative verb *xihuan* ('like') does not denote an affective or disposal on the object NP. Hence its BA counterpart is not acceptable by native speakers.

- (20) a. Wo ba juzi bo-le.
 I BA orange peel-ASP
 'I peeled the orange.'
 b. Wo bo-le juzi.
 I peel-ASP orange
 'I peeled the orange.'
- (21) a. *Wo ba ta xihuan-le.
 I BA him like-ASP
 'I liked him (now, became fond of him).'

b. Wo xihuan ta-le.

I like him-ASP

'I like him (now, became fond of him).'

(Li 2006: (100) and (101))

For this reason, I will focus on the topic construction, which can illustrate the A'-movement without a severe semantic interference. For topicalization, the object NP is moved to a position preceding the subject, and the object NP will receive stressed or contrastive reading. The topicalization test result is shown in (22). In (22a) the IO is topicalized, while the DO is topicalized instead in (22b).

- (22) a. (*)Lisi, Zhangsan song-le yi-ben shu. (IO)
 Lisi, Zhangsan give-ASP one-CL book
 'Lisi, Zhangsan gave him a book.'
- b. Zhe-ben shu, Zhangsan song-le Lisi. (DO)
 This-CL book Zhangsan give-ASP Lisi
 'This book, Zhangsan gave it to Lisi.'

Interestingly, there are also different results of (22a), in which the IO is topicalized. There are speakers who do not accept example (22a), but there are also speakers who accepts (22a). At this point we seem to encounter a dilemma here since there are also no consistent grammatical judgment. However, there is in fact a certain pattern which is worth paying attention to. The speakers who cannot accept IO passivization cannot accept IO topicalization, either. On the other hand, the speakers who can have IO passivization can have IO topicalization as well. This finding thus shows a consistency among different speakers. In addition, this constancy implies that the prohibition of IO passivization is not caused by the semantic adversity requirement. If the ungrammaticality of IO passivization is determined by the semantic adversity requirement, the IO topicalization should be acceptable for those speakers since there is no semantic interference in the later movement. However, we do not find such cases among those native speakers. This result therefore indicates that the cause of IO movement ungrammaticality is not a pure semantic factor. The grammaticality or ungrammaticality of IO movement, no matter it is passivization or topicalization, should be caused by syntactic derivations instead.

To summarize, in this section I have tried to investigate the causes of different judgments of IO passivization. Although there are new types of passives emerged in this so-called BEI Era, the adversity requirement on the passive subjects should not be a core factor to determine the grammaticality or ungrammaticality of IO passivization in the song DOC without GEI.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated the double object construction with the main verb *song* ('give'), without a following GEI. I show that there are different grammatical judgments regarding the IO passivization of the *song* DOC without GEI. This can be found from different speakers and the Google search. Although a possible cause of this judgment difference may be caused by the adversative reading on the subject of the BEI construction, I have argued that this is not attested since we do not find such evidence after the adversity requirement interference has been removed. This preliminary discussion therefore leads the exploration to different syntactic derivations which may cause the differences in the future.

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