

The “ditransitive construction” with indirect object as a provider in Mandarin Chinese

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Zhang (1998) states that in Mandarin Chinese, the apparent indirect object (IO) of a ditransitive construction is the provider of a theme when it occurs after single root transference verbs, verbs of change of state or even consumption verbs, e.g., *mai*³ ‘buy’, *da*³-*sui*⁴ ‘break’ and *chi*¹ ‘eat’. (1) is an example, in which *wo*³ ‘I’ is the provider of *ping*²*guo*³ ‘apple’.

- (1) Lao³li³ chi¹ le wo³ yi²ge⁴ ping²guo³
Laoli eat PFV 1st one.CLF apple
‘Laoli ate one apple of mine’ (Zhang: (11)b)

However, this paper argues that there is no real ditransitive construction compatible with these types of verbs. Rather, the seemingly “ditransitive construction” is actually a monotransitive construction. Tests such as object movement, *wh*-question and the addition of a possessive marker show that in this type of construction, the first post verbal NP, in the absence of a possessive marker *de*, is in fact the possessor of its following NP. The two NPs form a single larger NP constituent, which is then the single object of the verb. The monotransitive analysis explains why verbs of consumption in Mandarin can occur in a “ditransitive construction”, although they are not found in such constructions in other languages. It also predicts that what Zhang calls the “ditransitive construction” should be compatible with any monotransitive verb (e.g., *da* ‘hit’ and *kan* ‘look’) as long as the post verbal nouns are in a possessive relation; this prediction holds.

In addition, this paper shows that in Mandarin, a construction with two post-verbal nouns may have two types of deep structures, i.e., a possessive NP lacking a possessive marker or double objects (recipient and theme) of a real ditransitive construction. It is the meaning of the verb that determines which analysis the construction has. For instance, the construction involves a possessive NP when it involves verbs of taking or consumption because the actions expressed by these verbs generally do not involve recipient. Therefore, since the same surface string does not always reflect the same constituent structure, a semantic interpretation of the verb and post-verbal nouns must be done before the syntactic analysis.

References

- Zhang, N. 1998. Argument interpretations in the ditransitive construction. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics*. V21, 2. PP179-209.