GEI: towards a unified account<superscript>*</superscript>

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1.   Introduction

Mandarin *gei*[1] 'give' has been object of many studies due to its multifaceted properties and its presence in a number of different structures. However, previous analyses focus only on some of all the possible structures where *gei* appears, while excluding others.

In this paper, I aim at tracing: (i) a taxonomy of all *gei* constructions found in the literature and collected with questionnaires; (ii) proposing a unified analysis of gei that overarches as many as possible *gei* structures in Mandarin Chinese. I propose an analysis of *gei* in terms of structure, interpretation and grammaticalization. I demonstrate that *gei* is always a predicate whose different positions and interpretations can be seen as different stages of grammaticalization, which makes it either a full verb or a weaker predicate. Crucially, I argue that in all the different syntactic positions and stages of grammaticalization, *gei* maintain the general sense of *orientation*, in terms of Paris (1978, 1992). When *gei* is not a full lexical verb itself, its general meaning of *orientation* has an effect on the transitivity of the verb that precedes or follows. On the one hand, when *gei* is in a preverbal position, it highlights

[1] Mandarin (or Standard Chinese) is a tonal language, i.e. the pitch contour of a syllable is used to distinguish words from each other. It has four main tones: the first tone is described as high; the second as rising; the third as falling-rising; the four as falling, and one neutral tone. Gei 'give' analyzed in this paper is pronounced with the third tone.

the role of the agent of the verb, on the other hand, when gei is post-verbal, it reinforces the role of the recipient.

The article is organized as follows: in Section 2 I will illustrate and classify different gei constructions. I will also show that *gei* is always a predicate, full or light. In Section 3, I argue that the core meaning of *gei* that links all the *gei* structures is the meaning of *orientation*. In Section 4, I propose that the different categories of gei correspond to layers of grammaticalization.

2.   Data and category

Gei 'give' has been object of much debate in different fields of linguistics:[2] descriptive grammar (Xu Dan 1994, Zhu 1979, 1982) and semantic analysis (Paris 1978, 1992), functional approach (Li & Thompson 1981), construction grammar (Liu 2006), cognitive linguistics (Newman 1993a, 1993b), historical approach (Peyraube 1988, Chappell & Peyraube 2006, 2011), generative grammar (Tsai 2015, Tang 1979, 2009, Paul & Whitman 2010, Li & Huang 2015). *Gei* 'give' has been studied also in different varieties of Chinese, see for instance Chirkova (2008) and Ngai (2015). Generally, the authors mentioned above concentrates their analysis only on some of the constructions where gei appears, without taking in consideration the whole set of the different possible structures, including passives and the co-occurrence with *ba*, which precedes a direct object in disposal constructions (see Section 2.4). In this Section, I attempt a taxonomy of as many as possible *gei* constructions found in the literature and collected via questionnaires with Mandarin Chinese native speakers.

I have classified the different *gei* constructions in distinct groups in Table 1.

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[2] Since the literature on *gei* is vast, I will mention only some selected references.

Gei as full lexical verb																
1	S									gei		io	do			
2	S									gei			do			
Post-verbal gei																
3	S								V				do	gei	io	
4	S								V				do	gei	io	V
5	S								V		gei	io	do			
Two gei																
6	S									gei			do	gei	io	
Pre-verbal gei																
7	S			gei			io		V				do			
Passive gei																
8	SP			gei		Ag			V							
9	SP				bei	Ag		gei	V							
10	SP							gei	V							
Ba+O and Gei																
11	S	ba	do						V		gei	io				
12	S	ba	do						V		gei				io	V
13	S	ba	do					gei	V							
Geiyu																
14	S									geiyu	io	do				

Table 1.[3]

2.1   Gei as full lexical verb

The first group includes constructions where *gei* is undoubtedly a full lexical verb, i.e. constructions [1] and [2]. In these constructions, *gei* is the main verb of the sentence, but its interpretation changes depending of the element that follows. Example (1) represents construction [1], where *gei* has the general meaning of *giving*: It expresses

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[3] The abbreviations used in Table 1 are the following: S= Subject; io=indirect object; do=direct object; V= verb; SP= subject with the role of patient; Ag= agent; bei= particle that introduces the agent in passive constructions; ba= particle that introduces a direct object in disposal constructions.

the transfer of possession from an agent who has some thing, the theme, and passes over this thing to a recipient who receives it.

(1)   Zhangsan   gei   wo   zhe   ben   shu   le.

        Zhangsan   gei   1sg   this   clf   book fp

        Zhangsan gave me a book.

Example (2) represents construction [2], where *gei* is the main verb and is followed by a nominal element together with another verb.

(2)   Wo   yao   kan,   ta   jiu   gei   wo   kan

        1sg   want see   3sg   then   gei   1sg   see

        If I want to look, s/he will let me to look.

(Newman 1993a:1e)

In (2), *gei* acts as a control verb: the object of *gei* is also understood as the subject of the subordinated verb (*kan* 'see'), and expresses a permission *allow/let*. In (2) *gei* refers to the transfer of control over the act of seeing.

2.2   Post-verbal gei

The second group in Table 1 includes cases where *gei* occurs post-verbally. The sentences in (3) and (4) are examples of post-verbal dative alternation: they express a transfer of possession from an agent to a recipient as in (1), but differently from (1), in (3) and (4) *gei* is not the main verb of the clause. In the example (3) (construction

[5]), *gei* appears immediately on the right of the main verb (*mai* 'buy') and is followed by the recipient (*fuqin* 'father') and the theme (*shoujin* 'handerkerchief'). In example (4) (construction [3]), *gei* together with the recipient follows the theme, as exemplified in (4).

(3) Chuling   mai gei   fuqin yi   tiao shoujin

      Chuling   buy   gei   fatherone clff   handerkerchief

      Chuling bought a handkerchief to his father.

      (Paris 78:4)

(4) Chulin   mai yi   tiao shoujin   gei   fuqin.

      Chulin   buy   one clff   handerkechief   gei   father

      Chulin bought a handkerchief to his father.

      (Paris 78:5)

In the sentence in (5), the construction is similar to (4), but with in addition an embedded verb (*kan* 'see') at the end of the clause (construction [4]).

(5) Zhangsan na   chu yi   feng xin   gei Lisi kan.

      Zhangsa   take out one clff   letter gei Lisi read

      Zhangsan took out a letter for Lisi to read

Previous studies proposed different analyses about the categorical status of the post-verbal *gei*. *Gei* has been analyzed as preposition (Teng 1975, Tang 1979, Li & Thompson 1981, Li 1990, Tang 1990, Zhang 1990, McCawley 1992, Cheng & al.

1999, Lin 2001, Paul & Whitman 2010) as complementizer (Ting & Chang 2004, Her 2006), or as verb (Huang & Ahrens 1999, Huang & Mo 1992, Lin & Huang 2015). I defend the idea that the post-verbal *gei* is a verb. Some authors argue that *gei* is a preposition, since it cannot be followed by an aspectual marker, which can occur only on the right of the main verb (cf. the position of the aspectual marker *le* in (6a) with (6b)).

(6) a. *Zhangsan ti   yi   ge   qiu gei le   Lisi.

        Zhangsan kick one clff ball gei pfv Lisi

   b. Zhangsan ti   le   yi   ge   qiu gei Lisi.

        Zhangsan kick pfv one clff ball gei Lisi

        'Zhangsan kicked the ball to Lisi.'

(Huang & Mo 1992:17)

However, the restriction on the position of the aspectual marker can be explained if we analyze *gei* as secondary predicate in a Serial Verb Construction (henceforth SVC)[4] (Huang & Mo 1992, Huang & Ahrens 1999), where only the first verb can be marked with an aspectual marker. In example (5), *gei* is followed by a nominal phrase and a verb in a purposive clause. In this type of sentences, *gei* can be analyzed as a secondary predicate that controls the subject of the final verb.[5]As a matter of fact, the complement *Lisi* selected by *gei* is the subject of the verb *kan* 'read'.[6] The analysis of

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[4] Serial Verb Construction consists in a sequence of verbs with no overt connective marker; these verbs express simultaneous or immediately consecutive actions that can be conceived as one event. In previous studies, Serial Verb Construction is not a unified notion, see for instance Li & Thompson (1981), Sebba (1987), Lord (1993), Durie (1997), Aikhenvald (2006), Paul (2008) among many others.
[5] Lin & Huang (2015) argue that *gei* in a sentence like (5) forms a verbal phrase, which is a secondary predication that constitutes a resultative clause, which converts a resultative expression into a syntactic complement (Higginbotham 1995, Snyder 2001).
[6] Ting & Chang (2004) defines *gei* in examples like (5) as a permissive causative verb.

gei as a control verb is demonstrated by different facts. Firstly, if *gei* is a preposition without any control or predicational relation with the following verb, it is not possible to account for the ungrammaticality of (7), where *gei* together with the nominal phrase *Lisi* is separated from the final verb with the object:

(7) *Zhangsan na   chu gei Lisi yi   feng xin kan
     Zhangsan take out gei Lisi one   clff letter read
     Zhangsan takes out a letter for Lisi to read.

Huang & Mo (1992:24), in fact, show that prepositional objects are not eligible controller in Mandarin:

(8) Ta   fang le   yi ge wan zai   zhuoshang hen   youni
     3sg   out pfv   one clff bowl on   table   very greasy
(i)   S/he put a greasy bowl on the table.
(ii) *She put a bowl on the greasy table.
(Huang & Mo 1992:24)

Moreover, if *gei* is a preposition, we cannot explain why a verb like *chang* 'sing' or *fang* 'to put on', which do not allow a post-verbal prepositional phrase as recipient, can occur as the leading verb of a SVC (cf. (9a) with (9b) and (10a) with (10b)).

(9) a.   *Wo chang   le   yi   shou ge gei   ta.
           I   sing pfv   one   clf   song gei her/him
           'I sang a song to her/him.'

b. Wo   chang   le   yi   shou   ge   gei   ta   ting.

1sg   sing   pfv   clf   clf   song   gei   her/him   listen

'I sang a song for her to listen.'

(Her 2006: 50)

(10) a. *Zhangsan   fang   le   yi   bu   dianying   gei   dajia

Zhangsan   play   pfv   one   clf   movie   gei   everyone

b. Zhangsan   fang   le   yi   bu   dianying   gei   dajia   kan.[7]

Zhangsan   play   pfv   one   clf   movie   gei   everyone   watch

'Zhangsan played a movie for everyone to watch.'

(Huang & Mo 1992:29)

Moreover, if *gei* is a preposition it is not possible to explain why there are restrictions in the choice of the final verb. For instance, *gei* and the indirect object can be followed by a verb like *chi* 'eat' or *kan* 'look', while verbs like *zuo* 'make' or *xi* 'wash' are not acceptable (cf. (11a) with (11b)):

(11) a. Wo   song   pingguo   gei   ni   chi.

1sg   offer   apple   gei   2sg   eat

b. *Wo   ji   wo   de   yifu   gei   ni   xi

1sg   send   1sg   det   dress   gei   2sg   wash

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[7] For instance, notice also that in (10) *gei* can be substituted by another control verb like *qing* 'invite' or *rang* 'let':

(i)   Zhangsan   fang   le   yi   bu   dianying   qing/rang   dajia   xinshang.
       Zhangsan   play   perf   one   clf   movie   invite/let   everyone   enjoy
       'Zhangsan played a movie for everyone to enjoy.'

(Huang & Mo 1992:30)

Paul & Whitman (2010) defend the idea that post-verbal *gei* with its object in sentences like (4) is a prepositional phrase, because *gei* and the following nominal phrase can appear at the beginning of the sentence (cf. (12a) with (12b)).

(12) a.   Wo   mai   le   yi   ge   shoubiao   gei   Mali.

            1sg   buy   pfv   one   clf   watch   gei   Mali

            'I bought a watch to Mary.'

      b.   Gei   Mali, wo   mai   le   yi   ge   shoubiao.

            Gei   Mali 1sg   buy   pfv   one   clf   watch

            'For Mali, I bought a watch.'

(Paul & Whitman 2010:9)

However, this test is not enough to demonstrate that *gei* is a preposition in a prepositional phrase. Firstly, because a topic-comment structure[8] with a verbal phrase at the beginning of the sentence is very common in Mandarin (see for instance ex.(12)). Secondly, because the absence of a resumptive pronoun for an oblique case in sentence initial position is not admitted in Mandarin (cf. (13a) with (13b)).

(12) Piping   ziji   de   pengyou,   Zhangsan zhidao   wo   juedui   bu

     criticize   self   det   friend   Zhangsan know   1sg   definetly   no

     hui.

     will

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8 Chao (1968:69) suggests that "the grammatical meaning of subject and predicate in a Chinese sentence is topic and comment, rather than actor and action." Li & Thompson (1976) insists on the dichotomy between topic-prominent languages and subject-prominent languages, claiming that syntactic notions like subject and object are not grammaticalized in Chinese.

'Criticize his own friends, Zhangsan knows I definitely will not.'

(Huang 1993:52)

(13) a.　Wo　song le　Lisi　yi　zhang　　mingxinpian.

　　　1sg　send pfv　Lisi　one　clf　　　postcard

　　　I send a postcard to Lisi.

　　b.　*Lisi,　wo song le　　yi　zhang　　mingxinpian.

　　　Lisi　1sg　send pfv　one　clf　　　postcard

　　　To Lisi, I sent a postcard.

Additionally, as noticed by Paul & Whitman (2010), even if *gei* followed by a nominal phrase can appear at the beginning of the sentence, i.e. it is topicalized, the role of *gei* and the nominal phrase changes: from recipient 'to Mali', to beneficiary 'for Mali' (cf. (12a) with (12b)). The change in interpretation cannot be explained with the fact that *gei* and the following nominal phrase is a prepositional phrase, because topicalization never affects the thematic role of the topicalized items. Contrarily, the change of the thematic role shows that *gei* is a verb in a predication relation with the object of the sentence, so that it cannot be separated and appears at the beginning of the clause, as the predication relation would fail. I argue that *gei* and the following nominal phrase with the benefactive/delegative *on behalf of* reading actually takes its thematic role in a pre-verbal position, i.e. a syntactic position that encodes the benefactive/delegative interpretation.

The verbal status of post-verbal *gei* is shown also by the fact that it can be modified by an adverb (see (14)). Additionally, if the post-verbal *gei* followed by the nominal phrase is a prepositional phrase, their position at the end of the sentence would be an

exception. Prepositional phrases usually occupy preverbal positions in Mandarin. In post-verbal position only secondary predications, resultatives, and locatives are found.

(14) Zhangsan song le   yi   feng xin   mimidi   gei   Lisi.

Zhangsan send pfv one clf   letter secretly   gei   Lisi

Zhangsan sent a letter to Lisi secretly.

(Li & Huang 2015:26)

Notice also that if the post-verbal *gei* in (4) is a preposition, we cannot explain why it cannot be substituted by another preposition that still selects a recipient, like *ti* 'to':

(15) * Chulin   mai yi   tiao shoujin   ti   fuqin.

Chulin   buy one clf   handerkechief   to   father

Chulin bought a handkerchief to his father.

On the basis of all the arguments illustrated above, I conclude that the post-verbal gei in constructions [3] and [4] is a secondary predicate in a SVC.

The sentence in (16) exemplified construction [5], where post-verbal *gei* immediately follows the verb:

(16) Chuling   mai gei fuqin   yi   tiao shoujin

Chulin   buy gei father   one clf   handkerchief

Chulin bought a handkerchief to his father.

(Paris 78:4)

Gei that immediately follows the verb has been defined as co-verb (Li & Thompson 1981), preposition (Tang 1990, Ting & Chang 2004), or verb (Chao 1968, Li & Huang 2015, Huang & Mo 1992, Huang & Ahrens 1992). I am in line with the authors that analyze *gei* in (16) as a verb that forms a compound with the preceding verb. The fact that *gei* in (16) is not a preposition is demonstrated by different tests. For instance, the main verb and *gei* cannot be separated by the insertion of an aspectual marker, but the aspectual marker can follow them (cf. (17a) with (17b)):

(17) a. *Zhangsan ti   le   gei   Lisi   yi   ge   qiu

          Zhangsan kick pfv   gei   Lisi   one   clf   ball

      b. Zhangsan ti   gei   le   Lisi   yi   ge   qiu

          Zhangsna kick gei   pfv   Lisi   one   clf   ball

          Zhangsan kicked the ball to Lisi.

(from Huang & Mo 1992:13)

The restriction on the insertion of aspectual marker reveals lexical integrity between the main verb and *gei*,[9] and shows that *gei* cannot be a preposition. Moreover notice that in Mandarin, the presence of a prepositional phrase in between a verb and an object is not attested:

(18) *Ta fang zai   zhuoshang yi   ben   shu

      3sg put   on   table   one   clf   book

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[9] When two verbal elements form a compound, the insertion of an aspectual marker is not permitted:
(i)   Tamen   jian   (*le)   cha   le   wo   de   huzhao.
       3pl   inspect   pfv   examine   pfv   1sg   det   passport
       'They examined my passport.'
(Paul & Whitman 2010:22)

He put on the table a book.

(Huang & Mo 1992: 5)

A number of authors (Lin & Huang 2015, Her 2006, Liu 2006) propose that the verb together with *gei* that follows, form a lexical compound. The compound is formed by head adjunction. On the one hand, *gei* is the head of the verbal compound and it is responsible for the ditransitivity of the compound, since it selects the grammatical category of its host. On the other hand, the verb functions as a manner/mode modifier of *gei*.[10]

2.3   *Two gei in one sentence*

In colloquial style, two *gei* can co-occur in the same sentence (construction [5]):

(19) Ta   gei   le   qian   gei   (*le) Lisi le.

      3sg   gei   pfv   money   gei   pfv   Lisi fp

      He gave money to Lisi.

As for the interpretation in a sentence with two *gei*, the recipient is highly emphasized. In (19), the speaker intends to highlight that the recipient of the transfer is *Lisi* (and non someone else). I argue that this type of sentence includes the first two constructions [1] and [3] discussed above: the first *gei* is the main lexical verb, while

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[10] In the Generative Linguistics framework, Paul & Whitman (2010), argue that the compound formed by the verb and *gei* derived from a syntactic process, due to the fact that *gei* is in a High Applicative syntactic position where the verb moves to adjoins to *gei*. The postulation of an applicative syntactic position holds to explain the presence of *gei* together only with verbs that obligatorily require the presence of *gei* to select the third argument of a ditransitive predication. However, the applicative projection cannot account for cases where the presence of *gei* is optional, that is it is not necessary to select the recipient.

the second one is a secondary predication in a SVC. Notice that the insertion of a perfective marker is possible only after the first *gei*, i.e. in between *gei* and *qian* 'money'.

2.4 Preverbal *gei*

In preverbal *gei* structure (construction [7]), *gei* and the indirect object precedes the main verb as in the following example:

(20) Wo   gei   ta   xie   le   yi   feng   xin

    1sg   gei   him   write pfv   one   clf   letter

    I wrote a letter for/on behalf of him

When *gei* followed by the indirect object (henceforth gei+IO) precedes the main verb, either it has a benefactive/delegative *on behalf of*,[11] or is ambiguous between the benefactive/delegative interpretation (21i) and *allow/permit* interpretation (21ii). Interestingly, it is never interpreted as recipient (21iii):

(21) Wo   gei   Zhangsan   ti   xingli

    1sg   gei   Zhangsan   carry   luggage

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[11] Lin & Huang (2015) point out that *gei*+io in preverbal position can have also a maleficiary use as in the following sentence (from Lin and Huang 2015, footnote 10):
(i)   Zhangsan   jingran   gei   wo   pao   le
    Zhangsan   unexpectedly gei   1sg   run   fp
    Out of my expectation Zhangsan run away from me
The so-called maleficiary use recalls the ethical dative (Bosse & alii 2012) which introduces an attitude holder or experiencer, like the following example in French:
(ii)   Je   me   bois   une   bier
    1sg   to.me drink   a   beer
    'Je me bois une bier
Moreover, the maleficiary use has limitation in the person: Chinese can express the ethical dative only with the first personal pronoun while, for instance, in French the limitation includes first and second pronouns.

(i) I carry the luggage for Zhangsan   (benefactive/delegative *on behalf of*)

(ii) I allow Zhangsan to carry the luggage (allow/permit)

(iii) *I carry the luggage to Zhangsan   (recipient)

When *gei* in (21) is interpreted as *allow*, the syntactic structure of the sentence corresponds to construction [2] discussed in the previous section. When *gei* has the benefactive/delegative semantics, it can be substituted by the preposition like *wei* or *ti* 'for', which have only the benefactive/delegative interpretation (see ex. (22)). Such a substitution is not possible when *gei* is in a post-verbal position, as in (23).

(22) a.   Wo   gei   ta   mai   yi   jian dayi

            1sg   gei   3sg buy one   clf   coat

      b.   Wo   ti   ta   mai   yi   jian dayi

            1sg   prep 3sg buy one   clf   coat

            I bought a coat on his behalf

(Paris 1978:82)

(23) *Wo ji   le   yi   feng xin   wei/ti Zhangsan

      1sg   send asp   one   clf   letter to   Zhangsan

Moreover, the use of the preposition *wei/ti* excludes the ambiguity between benefactive/delegative *on behalf of* and *allow* reading.

Notice that gei+IO in preverbal position can be interpreted as recipient only in contexts where gei+IO is pragmatically a old information, i.e. it is a *topic*, i.e. a

phrase already mentioned or shared in the common ground[12] of the interlocutors. For instance in example (24), *Zhangsan* is the interpreted as recipient as he has been mentioned in the previous context by the Speaker A, i.e. *Zhangsan* is the topic (old information) of the sentence:

(24) Spk.A: Wo zhidao ni zuotian jian Zhangsan le.

'I know that yesterday you met met Zhangsan.'

Spk.B: Dui,   wo   gei   Zhangsan   dian   qian   le!

correct   1sg   gei   Zhangsan   advanced   money   fp

Yes, correct, I advanced money to Zhangsan!

On the contrary, when it is not a topic, *gei*+IO in preverbal position is always interpreted as benefactive/delegative. This is shown also by example (25), where the main verb is *dakai* 'open'. *Dakai* is an activity verb that does not denote a transfer event, so that it does not select a recipient complement, but only a benefactive/delegative one. *Gei*+IO, in fact, can only precede and never follow it (cf. (25a) with (25b)):

(25) a.   *Zhangsan dakai le   na   shan men gei   Lisi

Zhangsan open pfv   that clf   door gei   Lisi

b.   Zhangsan   gei   Lisi   dakai le   na   shan men

Zhangsan   gei   Lisi   open pfv   that   clf   door

Zhangsan opened that door for Lisi

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[12] *Common ground* is a concept intended as the collection of mutual knowledge, mutual beliefs, and mutual assumptions among two or more interlocutors.

On the basis of the observations above, I propose that the syntactic position occupied by preverbal benefactive/delegative *gei*+IO is different with respect to preverbal *gei*+IO interpreted as recipient: benefactive/delegative gei+IO is in a syntactic position between the subject and the verb, while *gei*+IO recipient occupies a higher syntactic position where it is interpreted as a topic, that is the given information within a context. In other words, benefactive/delegative *gei*+IO can never be interpreted as a topicalized information, i.e. in syntactic terms, it cannot occupy a topicalized position. This is what turns out when we test a sentence with a topicalized *gei*+IO at the beginning of the sentence, with a topic-comment structure as in (26). The topicalized *gei*+IO in sentence initial position cannot have a benefactive/delegative reading (26i), but only the recipient reading (26ii).

(26)   Gei Lisi, wo   xie   xin   le.

          Gei   Lisi   1sg   write letter fp

    (i)   *For/on behalf Lisi, I wrote a letter.

    (ii)   To Lisi, I wrote a letter.

The topicalization of a verb phrase or a prepositional phrase is a very common strategy in Mandarin. The impossibility for *gei* to be interpreted as benefactive/delegative when it is in syntactic topic position, suggests that the benefactive/delegative *gei* is neither a full lexical verb nor a preposition. In what follows, in fact, I suggest that the benefactive/delegative *gei* is still a predicate, but with a weaker meaning with respect to the full lexical *gei*. I will call it semi-lexical

verb (or light verb), since its behavior is not as that of a full lexical verb, but still has some properties of a verb.

On the one hand, *gei* that introduces a benefactive/delegative complement is not a preposition because the indirect object can be dislocated without *gei* to the beginning of the sentence (see ex. (27)), while this is not possible with a regular prepositional phrase:

(27) Zhangsan, wo   gei   mai le   yi   ben   shu

Zhangsan 1sg gei buy pfv one clf   book

As for Zhangsan, I bought a book for him.

Moreover, *gei* cannot be always substituted by a preposition:

(28) Zhangsan wei/*gei   zhanyou   xisheng   le

Zhangsan for   gei   camarade   sacrifice   fp

Zhangsan   sacrified himself for his camarade

(Yu and Hu 2014:ft 10)

On the other hand, some previous studies defend the idea that preverbal *gei* is not a verb because it cannot be reduplicated (see ex.(30a)) and it cannot take an aspectual marker (see ex. (30b)):

(29) a.   *Zhangsan gei gei   Lisi dakai le   na   shan men

Zhangsan gei gei   Lisi open pfv   that clf   door

Zhangsan opened that door for Lisi

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b. *Zhangsan gei le Lisi dakai na shan men

Zhangsan gei pfv Lisi open that clf door

Zhangsan opened that door for Lisi

Interestingly, as Lin and Huang (2015:12) point out, similar behavior is common in Mandarin with some verbs like *shi* 'cause' (see ex. (30)), which is generally analyzed as a light verb (Grimshaw & Mester 1988, Feng 2003, Zhu 2005, Jie 2008, Basciano 2010). As light verb, in fact, *shi* undergoes to some syntactic restrictions that full lexical verbs do not.

(30) (i) Zhangsan shi Lisi kaixin

Zhangsan cause Lisi happy

Zhangsan made Lisi happy

(ii) *Zhangsan shi-shi Lisi kaixin

(iii) *Zhangsan shi-shi le Lisi kaixin

Due to the fact that *gei* is not a preposition or a full lexical verb, but undergoes the same restrictions of a light verb as the causative *shi*, I propose that the preverbal benefactive/delegative *gei* should be analyzed as a light verb as well, which lost its full lexical verb features in a grammaticalization process (see Section 4). The analysis of preverbal benefactive/delegative *gei* as light verb could explain a further restriction that *gei* undergoes when co-occur with a direct object preceded by *ba*. *Ba* is a particle that introduces the object in contexts where the verb expresses disposal of/action upon the object. Therefore, it is generally used with verbs that are high in transitivity, a property that describes the effect a verb has on its object. Interestingly, preverbal

benefactive/delegative *gei* cannot co-occur with *ba* and its object, as exemplified (31a). *Gei* can co-occur with *ba* in the same sentence only if introduces a recipient in post-verbal position (see example (31b), construction [1] in Table 1).

(31) a.   *Lisi ba   xin   gei   ta   xie   le.

Lisi   ba   letter gei   3sg   write fp

b.   Wo   ba   zhe   ge   xiaoxi   chuan   gei   ta   le.

I   ba   this   clf   news   transmit   gei   3sg   fp

I have transmitted this news to him

(Paris 1978:12)

In the literature, and questionnaires I did not find any occurrence of the structure schematized in (32), where *gei*+IO is interpreted as benefactive/delegative.

(32)

S	gei	io	ba	do	V

Not attested

The literature on the function word *ba* is vast (see Sybesma 1999 and references quoted there). What is relevant here, is the fact that also *ba* has been analyzed considered a light verb, so as such, it cannot co-occur with the preverbal benefactive/delegative *gei*. The impossibility of the co-occurrence of *ba* and preverbal benefactive/delegative *gei* is a further evidence that *gei* is a light verb as well, because two light verbs cannot appear in a sentence at the same time. Recall, moreover, that the benefactive/delegative *gei* cannot be topicalized to the beginning of the sentence

(as shown in (26i)), in line with the syntactic behavior of *ba* and other light verbs in Mandarin:

(33)   *Ba zhe ge   xiaoxi,   wo   chuan   gei   ta   le.

         ba   this clf news   1sg   transmit gei   3sg   fp

2.6   *Gei in passive constructions*

Constructions [8, 9, 10] in Table 1 represent passive constructions, where *gei* is in preverbal position. The most common passive marker in Chinese is *bei,* which can mark passive constructions with or without an agent overtly expressed (respectively in (34a) and (34b)):

(34) a.   Zhangsan bei Lisi da   guo

           Zhangsan bei Lisi beat pfv

           Zhangsan has been beaten by Lisi

    b.   Fangzi   bei   chai   le

          house   bei   demolish fp

          The house was demolished

In (34a), *bei* introduces the agent, while in (34b) *bei* immediately precedes the verb. On pair with *bei*, *gei* can be used as passive marker appearing immediately on the left of the verb (35a), introducing the agent (35b), or in co-occurrence with *bei*, where *bei* introduces the agent and *gei* precedes the verb (35c):

(35) a.　Zhangsan　gei　daibu le

　　　　　Zhangsan　gei　arrest fp

　　　　　Zhangsan got arrested

(Huang 2013:29)

　　　b.　Jinyu　　　gei　mao　chi　le

　　　　　goldfish　gei　cat　eat　fp

　　　　　The goldfish has been eaten by the cat

(Newman 1996:206)

　　　c.　Chuangzi　bei　Lisi　gei　dapo le.

　　　　　Window　　bei　Lisi　gei　broke fp

　　　　　The window got broken by Lisi

(Huang 2013:36)

Gei in passive constructions is a controversial tropic in Chinese linguistics. Generally, *gei* has been described either as light verb (Tang 2006), or a semi-lexical category that together with an unaccusative verb forms a middle construction (Shen & Sybesma 2010), or a semi-lexical verb that is part of *passivization continuum* (Huang 2013). In this article, I analyze gei in passive constructions as a semi-lexical category in the sense that *gei* behaves like a functional verb, a light verb. With light verb (or semi-lexical verb), I intend an element that behaves like a functional item, while maintaining part of its lexical meaning. On pair with the benefactive/delegative *gei*, in fact, also in passive constructions, *gei* in preverbal position is not a fully independent lexical element, since no aspectual marker can be inserted between *gei* and the verb:

(36) *Zhangsan gei le daibu

     Zhangsan gei pfv arrest

     Zhangsan got arrested

Gei can be substituted by *bei*[13] (as in (35b)) that is generally analyzed as a light verb as well.

Crucially, I propose that *gei* has an effect on the transitivity of the verb, like an auxiliary, while keeping its *transfer* semantics, and *orientation* as its basic meaning. More precisely, the presence of *gei* gives a strong sense of passivity to the verb is attached too. *Gei* has a causative sense because it implies an agent. Tang (2001) calls it "affectedness *gei*", while Shen and Sybesma (2010) point out that the addition of *gei* to a sentence does not affect its independent grammaticality, but it signals the existence of an "external force". Notice, in fact, that differently from *bei*, preverbal *gei* can co-occur with an object marked by *ba* (construction [12] exemplified in (37)), which is another semi-lexical item that "usually focuses attention on how the object is disposed of, dealt with, manipulated or handled by the subject" (Tiee 1986:285). As mentioned above, *ba*-construction is generally a highly transitive construction, where *transitivity* is defined as "the carrying over of an activity from an agent to a patient" (Wang 1987).[14] I argue that *ba* and preverbal *gei* co-occur to highlight the transitivity, i.e. the role of the agent that with his action has a strong effect on the patient. In this construction *ba* and preverbal *gei* can co-occur because *gei* is not an independent light verb, but it behaves like an affix to the following verb, as shown above (ex.(36)).

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[13] Notice that *bei* and *gei* are not always interchangeable. For instance, *gei* may occur with intransitive verbs, while *bei* cannot; *gei* can co-occur with *ba*+ object, while *bei* cannot (see Shen & Sybesma 2010 for further details).

[14] For an overview and a detailed syntactic analysis of *ba* construction see Sybesma (1992) and references cited there.

(37) Zhangsan ba Lisi gei da le

Zhangsan ba Lisi gei hit fp

Zhangsan hit Lisi.

To reinforce the statement made above, notice that *gei* in passive constructions is generally used in a more unfavorable or detrimental situation like (38):

(38) a. Lisi gei piping le

Lisi gei criticize fp

Lisi has been criticized

b. yu gei mao chi le

fish gei cat eat fp

the fish has been eaten by the cat

I will define in more detail the basic meaning of orientation that is subsumed in *gei* in all the constructions in the following Section.

3. Orientation

In previous Sections I have traced a taxonomy of all *gei* constructions found in the literature and collected with questionnaires. I have also illustrated and analyzed the main syntactic and interpretation properties of *gei* related to the different constructions. In particular, I have shown that *gei* is always a predicate, either it is a full lexical verb or a semi-lexical verb, it is an affix that forms a compound with the main verb.

When *gei* is a full lexical verb has as its basic meaning the act of *giving*. It is a ditransitive predicate that selects three arguments involved in an action of *transfer*. In terms of Newman (1993a:437): "…the typical scenario involving the act of giving [is the following]: there is a person who has something and this person passes over the thing with his/her hands to another person who receives it with his/her hands." In other words, *gei* as *give* selects three participants in an action where something has been handed over. *Gei*, in fact, is usually translated with the verb *give* or with the preposition *to*. However, if we compare *gei* as full lexical verb with *gei* in pre-verbal and post-verbal position, we notice that its effect on the predication changes.

In this section, I develop Paris' (1989) proposal, arguing that the core meaning of *gei* that links all the constructions that seem apparently disjointed in Table 1 is the *orientation* meaning.

I argue that *gei* is a relational predicate that is used in an abstract sense as casual reaction between an agent and a verb. The type of casual reaction depends on its position within the structure. The different casual relations are associated with distinct *orientation* of the casual reaction: either towards the agent or towards the patient. Paris (1989) defines the orientation meaning as *sense*, a French term that means both *meaning* (in French *signification*) and *direction* (in French *direction*). *Gei*, in fact, plays a crucial role in the *orientation* of the transitivity, so that it can be defined as an *orientation* marker of the predicate relation. In order to clarify *gei's* role in more detail, firstly I point out that I will adopt Hopper & Thompson's (1980:266) definition of transitivity (quoted in Paris 1989:65): "[Transitivity] is a relationship which obtains throughout a clause. It is not restricted to one constituent or pair of constituent. Consequently, the presence of an overt O[bject] is only one feature of a Transitive clause; it coexists with other defining properties (such as Agency, Kinesis [Aspect,

Punctuality, Volitionality, Affirmation, Mode, Agency, Affectedness of O, Individuation of O]).” Crucially, Hopper & Thompson's definition intends transitivity as a network of relations where the application domain is the whole clause, not only the verb. I advance the idea that *gei* is not an active or passive marker, but, it reinforces the expressions of the two types of diatheses in one or another direction, depending on its position within the structure.

Additionally, I will show that *gei's* role of *orientation* of the casual reaction towards the agent or towards the patient, matches to its syntactic position with respect to the verb. In preverbal position, *gei* reinforces the role of the agent - *agent-oriented*- (see Tsai 2015),[15] while in post-verbal position, *gei* reinforces the role of the patient-*patient-oriented*-. The generalization of *gei* as *orientation* marker that reinforces the transitivity (in Hopper & Thompson's sense) in two direction includes also the cases of *gei* as lexical verb, both in its functions as *transfer* verb, and as *allow* verb.

3.1 Agent-oriented preverbal gei

On the basis of the generalization proposed above, *gei* in preverbal position acts as *orientation* marker that reinforces the role of the agent in the casual relation between the two arguments selected by the main verb. Within the taxonomy in Table 1, *gei* in preverbal position occurs in passive constructions or preceds the object, assuming a benefactive/delegative *on behalf of* interpretation, or as full lexical verb with *allow* meaning.

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[15] Tsai (2015) points out that gei in preverbal position is in a *agent-oriented* domain.

As for passive constructions, *gei* emphasizes the role of the agent in different ways. In construction [8], gei overtly introduces the agent, i.e. it acts as *bei*, a light verb that typically introduces the agent in Mandarin passive constructions.

The analysis of *gei* as semi-lexical verb that has a role in reinforcing the casuality relation of predicate, is in line with recent studies on Mandarin light verbs (Basciano 2010), with the difference that *gei* is agent-oriented. In the passive construction classified in construction [10], *gei* can immediately precedes the verb, without the necessity that the agent is overtly expressed. This construction is crucial to demonstrate the *gei* as agent-oriented marker in preverbal position. In construction [10], in fact, the presence of *gei* implies the existence of an external force. As mentioned above, Shen & Sybesma (2010) claim that "the addition of *gei* to a sentence does not affect its independent grammaticality, it signals the existence of an 'external force' whose identity is somewhat slippery or hard to grasp" (Shen & Sybesma 2010: cited in Huang 2013:108). The sense of action of some external force has been confirmed by all Mandarin native speakers I have consulted. [16] Compare for instance (39a) with (39b): as Shen & Sybesma (2010) claim, the presence of *gei* in (39b) indicates that the bird flew away due to some external force that caused the bird flowing away. Contrarily, 39(a) does not imply any external agent.

(39) a.   Xiaoxiao   feizou   le

             little bird   flow away   fp

             The little bird flew away

     b.   Xiaoxiao   gei   feizou   le

             little bird   gei   flow away   fp

---

[16] More precisely, some native speakers told me that *gei* has a very light pronunciation and that the role of the agent makes the action on the object stronger.

(Someone or something caused that) the bird flew away.

(Shen & Sybesma 2010: 40-41)

Additionally, Shen & Sybesma (2010) point out that, differently from the canonical passive marker *bei*, *gei* cannot occur with unergative verbs, because unergatives have only the agent but the agent is not an external force whose action has effects on a patient (see ex.(40)).

(40) *Ta   gei   ku   le

      3sg   gei   cry   fp

      He was made to cry

(Shen & Sybesma 2010:38)

The co-occurrence of *bei* and *gei* is possible (Construction [9]), even if it sounds redundant.

A further construction that proves the role of *gei* as agent-oriented marker in preverbal position is construction [7], where gei introduces a benefactive/ delegative complement on the left of the main verb.

Even it is true that the benefactive/delegative refers to a person who constitutes in a way the motivation for some act, the role of the agent who does something *on behalf of* someone else is the crucial part of the action. In the delegative interpretation, we intend the change of the origin of the action or translation of agentivity (see Paris 1989).

The agent-oriented analysis of preverbal *gei* includes also construction [2], where *gei* means *allow/permit*. In line with Newman (1993a, 1993b), I include this type of

construction within the *control domain,* where once again the role of the agent is crucial since it is the argument that has the control granting the permission to someone to perform an act.

3.2 Recipient-oriented post-verbal gei

I have demonstrated above that the post-verbal *gei* in constructions [3, 4, 5] is a predicate within a SVC. In this position, *gei* is not used as full verb of transfer, but its meaning is bleached: post-verbal *gei* does not select three arguments, but it reinforces the orientation towards the recipient of the main verb that follows. It is crucial to point out that we can make a distinction between *lexical dative* verbs from *extended dative* verbs (Chappell & Peyraube 2011, see also Leclère 1978 and Zhu 1979). Lexical dative verbs presuppose an indirect object, thus the presence of *gei* is optional. Extended dative verbs do not have the properties to select a third argument, therefore they need the presence of *gei* to express the transfer action.[17] In fact, when a verb requires *gei*, it is because otherwise the verb alone does not imply any action of transfer, i.e. it does not have the properties to select a recipient. Take for instance the verb *mai* 'buy' (see example (3) repeated here in (41) for reader's convenience):

(41) Chuling   mai *(gei)   fuqin   yi   tiao shoujin

Chuling   buy gei   father   one   clf   handerkerchief

Chuling bought a handkerchief to his father.

(Paris 79:4)

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[17] See Liu (2006) for an exhaustive classification of verbs that obligatorily or optionally require the presence of *gei* to select the third argument of a ditransitive construction.

The verb *mai*, needs the presence of *gei* to express the idea of buying as a transfer action. As illustrated in Section 2.2, I analyze *gei* in (41) as the second verb within a SVC. In (41), the main action is the act of buying, and *gei* has the function to point out that the act of buying is oriented towards the recipient *fuqin* 'father'. The recipient-oriented feature of post-verbal *gei* is even more evident when it co-occurs optionally with verbs that do not necessarily require it, because their intrinsic meaning implies the idea of transfer, selecting a recipient. Take for instance the verb *song* 'offer/give something as a gift to someone' in (42):

(42) Wo   song (gei) ta   yi   ben   shu

     I   offer gei   esg   one   clf   book

     I gave him a book as a present

All the native speakers I have consulted confirmed that the presence of *gei* is a way to reinforce the recipient. Put in other terms, it seems that in (42), *gei* reinforces the transitivity of the action highlighting the recipient. In the lexical compound, in fact, some verbs immediately followed by *gei* do not exhibit the ditransitivity property, but they appear to be fixed (Lin & Huang 2015: footnote 8): *jia-gei* 'marry' (*Mali jiagei* 'Mary is married to'), *shu-gei* 'lose' (*Mali shugei Lisi* 'Mary is lost to Lisi'). As a matter of fact, the verbs listed above do not introduce a third argument, but they confirm the orientation analysis, since they all imply an action strongly oriented towards someone else. In the following clause, *gei* is even used to introduce a second argument:

(43) Zhangsan zhai gei Lisi yi   duo   hua

Zhangsan pluck gei Lisi one clf flower

Zhangsan plucked a flower to Lisi

(Lin & Huang 2015: 30)

This generalization for *gei* as an orientation marker holds also, on the one hand, for *gei* used as full lexical verb with *allow* meaning. With *allow gei* the reinforced orientation is towards the agent that controls the action (in line with Newman's (1993a, 1993b) classification of *allow* gei within the *control* domain). The orientation marker analysis, on the other hand, holds also for *gei* as full lexical verb with *give* interpretation. G*ive* interpretation, in fact, includes both the orientations, since its meaning of *giving* typically translate the *transfer*, that is, it is a relational predicate that necessarily involves a relation between an agent and a patient.

4. Grammaticalization

I have shown that *gei* is always a predicate whose core meaning is *orientation*. The *orientation* expressed by gei can change *direction* depending on the position that *gei* occupies within the structure. When in preverbal position, *gei* reinforces the orientation of transitivity towards the agent. When in post-verbal position, *gei* reinforces the orientation of transitivity towards the recipient. Along the line of Huang (2013), I propose that the shift regarding the *orientation* can be represented in a *causative-unaccusative continuum*. Huang claims that *gei* has two senses, each occurring at one extreme of a causative-unaccusative continuum. In particular, speaking about non canonical passives, Huang (2013:95) states: "Non canonical passives are formed by superimposing on the main predicate a higher semi-lexical

verb whose meaning may include one or more points in a the causative-unaccusative spectrum…verbs may differ in having different *bandwidths* along the spectrum". Taking Huang's proposal as basis, I make a step further arguing that the different positions of *gei* in the semantic *continuum* correspond to different stages of a grammaticalization process. With grammaticalisation, I intend the definition proposed by Hopper & Traugott (2003:121): "Grammaticalization is the change whereby in certain linguistic contexts speakers use parts of a construction with a grammatical function. Over time the resulting grammatical item may become more grammatical by acquiring more grammatical functions and expanding its host-classes". The concept of semantic continuum and its relation to different stages of grammaticalization reminds the concept of *cline* considered as the basic to work on grammaticalization (see Halliday 1961). With cline, we intend that from the point of view of change, forms do not shift abruptly from one category to another, but got through a series of small transitions. "Synchronically a cline can be thought of as a continuum: an arrangement of forms along an imaginary line at one end of which is fuller form of some kind, perhaps "lexical", and at the opposite end a compacted and reduced form, perhaps "grammatical" (Hopper & Traugott 2003:6). In their work of (2004), Hopper and Traugott add that there are times of overlap between the different stages of a cline. Therefore, it should not be seen as a clean sequencing but rather as a layering. With *gei*, in fact, it seems the different layers of grammaticalization represented in a cline are synchronic and visible. Gei maintains its own morphonological properties, changing functions depending on the position it occupies within the structure. According to Bisang (2004:117) "in a language like Chinese a lexeme may occur in different syntactic environment with different functions". Such propensity of lexical items to appear in different slots, supports the reanalysis of lexemes in different

functions, and thus enhances the probability of processes of grammaticalization to take place (see also Arcodia 2013). Crucially, according to Bisang (2010:246), "Chinese has two typological properties which fundamentally drive processes of grammaticalization. One of them is the relative freedom with which one and the same lexical item can be assigned to different grammatical functions. The other one is that one and the same surface structure is open to different syntactic analyses".

As I have shown in detail in the previous sections, *gei* is always a predicate with sense of orientation as its core meaning, however the predication is expressed in different ways depending on the position within the construction. *Gei* can be a full lexical verb, thus occupying an extreme of the semantic continuum expressing a three arguments predicate.

However, the post-verbal *gei* is a predication with a bleached meaning within a SVC, that is *gei* has its transfer meaning weakened through generalization, more specifically loss of contentful meaning (Brinton & Traugott 2005: 108-110). Interestingly, as Li (1990) and Chao-fen Sun (p.c. cited by Huang and Mo 1992) point out, *gei* in SVC's marks both the goal and beneficiary arguments and no longer has the full predicative meaning.

Gei in preverbal position represents a further stage of grammaticalization, as it behaves like a semi-lexical verb. In passive constructions, *gei* is a functional element that stresses the role of the agent without the need to make it explicit. In passive constructions, in fact, *gei* loses completely its meaning of transfer verb, which it has as full lexical verb, but it has exclusively a functional value. I define these stages of grammaticalization as *decategorialization* in terms of Hopper (1991:22), i.e. a process by which forms ''lose or neutralize the morphological markers and syntactic

privileges characteristic of the full categories Noun and Verb, and […] assume attributes characteristic of secondary categories".

The complete stage of grammaticalization is represented by *gei* used as prefix or suffix, immediately attached to the right or to the left of the main verb with which it forms a compound. Both as prefix and suffix, the role of *gei* is the reinforcement of orientation respectively towards the agent or the recipient. I tentatively push my analysis forward, proposing that the optional post-verbal *gei* that forms a compound with the preceding verb, actually acts as a sort of *directional* that overtly reinforces the orientation of the predicate towards the recipient in a figurative way. So, if I am on the right track, post-verbal *gei* as suffix could represents a further stage of grammaticalization as a directional element, on pair of verbs like *shang* 'go up/up' that are both full lexical verb and directional. I will leave this hypothesis open for further research.

In line with Bisang (2014), I suggest that all the stages of grammaticalization of *gei* I have described above are included in what Traugott (2002 p26-27) defines as primary grammaticalization. Primary grammaticalization is intended as the development of specific morphosyntactic contexts of constructions and lexical categories in functional categories. Primary grammaticalization includes the phenomenon of gei as semi-lexical element in pre-verbal positions, with *gei* with the bleached meaning or *gei* as affix. For Bisang (1996, 2004, 2008), in fact, the languages of East Asia possess typological features that make possible to have highly grammaticalised items retaining their original phonological shape. That is, the different stages of grammaticalization are characterized by the absence of coevolution of form and meaning, since even highly grammaticalized items tend to preserve their original shape (see also Arcodia 2013). This is also in accordance with the idea that in

Mandarin there is a weak correlation between lexicon and morphosyntax: "One can see the difference between lexical and grammatical items, but it is often difficult to distinguish 'more' or 'less' grammaticalised signs" (Arcodia 2013:149). Bisang interprets this lack of correlation as the relative freedom with which items may occupy a slot. As Arcodia (2013, citing Bisang 2004:117) clfaims: "whereas we usually assume that lexical items appear in certain syntactic (or construction) slots, in languages as Chinese a lexeme may occur in different syntactic environments with different functions."

In all its stages of grammaticalization, the tendency of *gei* seems to be the expression of the reinforcement of orientation in one on the other direction, towards the agent or towards the recipient, loosing the specific meaning of transfer or becoming pure functional or affix, without a change in its morphological form. Crucially, in terms of Traugott (1988) and in line with the analysis of dative constructions in pre-medieval Chinese by Chappell & Peyraube (2011), I argue that *gei* plays a role of strenghtening the informativeness through the pragmatic reinforcement. As Arcodia (2013) points out, the indeterminateness, the weak correlation between lexicon and morphosyntax of Chinese motivates the predominance of pragmatic inference. Notice, in fact, the strenghtening role of *give* is represented in construction [6], where the double presence of *gei* is redundant and it is used only in cases where the speaker wants to strengthen the orientation of the predication towards the recipient. Another example of strengthening the orientation is also represented by the full lexical verb *geiyu* 'give', which is used in formal context, more in the written language and usually only with abstract objects:

(44) Tamen   geiyu women   relie de   huanying.

3pl   give 1pl   warm det   welcome

They gave us a warm welcome.

Geiyu 'give' is a compound, formed by *gei* and *yu* 'give'. Also *yu* expresses a general act of giving. *Yu* appears in constructions like [V1+V2+IO+DO] in pre-medieval periods 2ndBC-2ndAD (Chappell & Peyraube 2011, Chappell & Peyraube 2007)[18]. V1 is a verb of giving implying a specific type of giving, like 'transmit, offer, sell, distribute'. V2 is *yu*, which expresses only a general sense of giving.[19] As Chappell & Peyraube (2011:2) state: "the complex construction is obviously redundant as the meaning of give expressed by V2 is already included in that of the V1. This is a good example of "strengthening of informativeness (Traugott [1988])".[20]

Geiyu, then, it is a compound that it formed by two words with 'give' meaning, in this sense the informativeness of act of given is strengthen by the form of the compound itself.

5.   Conclusions

In this paper I propose a taxonomy that overarches all *gei* constructions found in the Chinese linguistics literature and in questionnaires tested with native Mandarin speakers. Through syntactic tests and observation related to the different interpretations that *gei* assumes, I have shown that *gei* is always a predicate or an affix forming a compound with the main verb. I also argue that *gei* in all its categorial forms, has the basic meaning of *orientation*, subsumed in all *gei* constructions, which

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[18] For an exhaustive study on the evolution of dative constructions see Peyraube (1988).

[19] The character corresponding to the *yu* in *geiyu* is the following: 予.Chappell & Peyraube (2011) specify that verbs in V2 position actually can be three distinct verbs [+give], these are: yu 予 yu 与 and wei 遗。

[20] Notice also that *geiyu* can be pronounced also *jiyu*, maybe indicating that a further process of grammaticalization is in act, changing also the phonological properties of gei.

apparently seem do not have common properties. The sense of *orientation* brought by *gei*, affects the transitivity of the main verb, reinforcing the role of the agent or the patient. The orientation in the two different senses depends on the syntactic position that *gei* occupies with respect to the main verb. Finally, I propose that the multiplicity of the different categories assumed by *gei* is a result of a grammaticalization process. In particular, I propose that the categories assumed by *gei* can be represented as layers in a grammaticalization continuum that is still *visible* in synchronic syntax. *Gei* is a full lexical verb, a verb with a bleached meaning, a light verb, or an affix.

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