GEI: towards a unified account

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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

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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


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.
### Table 1.

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### 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
(3) Chuling mai gei fuqin yi tiao shoujin
    Chuling buy gei father one clf handkerchief
    Chuling bought a handkerchief to his father.
    (Paris 78:4)

(4) Chulin mai yi tiao shoujin gei fuqin.
    Chulin buy one clf handkerchief 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 clf letter gei Lisi read
    Zhangsan took out a letter for Lisi to read

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 clf ball gei pfv Lisi  

b. Zhangsan ti le yi ge qiu gei Lisi.  
Zhangsan kick pfv one clf 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), Sebbà (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).  
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 clf 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 clf 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 gei ta.
    I sing pfv one clf song gei her/him
    ‘I sang a song to her/him.’
b. Wo chang le yi shou 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.
      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

\footnote{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 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 zhidaow wo juedui bu criticize self det friend Zhangsan know 1sg definitely 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 handkerchief 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 an aspectual marker reveals lexical integrity between the main verb and gei, 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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7 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*.

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, 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
    Je me bois une bier
    ‘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/tiZhangsan
    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\(^\text{12}\) 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 zhidaon ni zuotian jian Zhangsan le.
              ‘I know that yesterday you 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

\(^{12}\) \textit{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 sacrificed 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 aspektual 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
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)

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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.

\[ ba \text{ this clf news } 1sg \text{ transmit gei } 3sg \text{ fp} \]

### 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

\[ Zhangsan \text{ bei Lisi beat pfv} \]

Zhangsan has been beaten by Lisi

b. Fangzi bei chai le

\[ house \text{ bei demolish fp} \]

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 trope 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:
*Zhangsan gei le daibu
Zhangsan gei pfv arrest
Zhangsan got arrested

Gei can be substituted by bei\textsuperscript{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” (Tinee 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).\textsuperscript{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)).

\textsuperscript{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).

\textsuperscript{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 \textit{gei} is a full lexical verb has as its basic meaning the act of \textit{giving}. It is a ditransitive predicate that selects three arguments involved in an action of \textit{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, \textit{gei} as \textit{give} selects three participants in an action where something has been handed over. \textit{Gei}, in fact, is usually translated with the verb \textit{give} or with the preposition \textit{to}. However, if we compare \textit{gei} as full lexical verb with \textit{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 \textit{gei} that links all the constructions that seem apparently disjointed in Table 1 is the \textit{orientation} meaning.

I argue that \textit{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 \textit{orientation} of the casual reaction: either towards the agent or towards the patient. Paris (1989) defines the orientation meaning as \textit{sense}, a French term that means both \textit{meaning} (in French \textit{signification}) and \textit{direction} (in French \textit{direction}). \textit{Gei}, in fact, plays a crucial role in the \textit{orientation} of the transitivity, so that it can be defined as an \textit{orientation} marker of the predicate relation. In order to clarify \textit{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.

\(^{15}\) 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 casualty 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.  

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. 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 handkerchief

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 jiaqei* ‘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 ge 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. Give 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) claims: “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 strengthening 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 strengthening 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 huying.
3pl  give  1pl  warmdet  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). 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. 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]).”

*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* 与 and *wei* 为.
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 synchronous syntax. Gei is a full lexical verb, a verb with a bleached meaning, a light verb, or an affix.

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