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GRAMMATICALIZATION IN SINITIC LANGUAGES

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1. Introduction

While it is generally accepted that the word ‘grammaticalization’ was used for the first time by Antoine Meillet in 1912, the process of grammaticalization has been a well known phenomenon for many centuries in China, at least from the 14th century, when Zhou Boqi, a Chinese scholar of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) stated that ‘today’s empty words are all former full words’ (*jīn zhī xū zì jiē gǔ zhī shí zì* 今之虚字皆古之实字). The process was later called *xūhuà* 虚化 ‘voiding’, before the term ‘grammaticalization’ (*yǔfǎhuà* 语法化) was coined in standard Mandarin in the 1980s. In fact, the tradition of dividing all the words of the Chinese language into two main categories, full words (*shící* 实词 or full lexical items) and empty words (*xūcí* 虚词 or functional grammatical morphemes), is still in current use.¹

In this article, the topics to be discussed are the evolution of the disposal or object marking constructions, passive and causative constructions and classifiers. They have been chosen to represent some of the special features of grammaticalization pathways, typical of Sinitic. The model of grammatical change used in the following sections will refer to two main mechanisms: analogy and reanalysis; the former includes degrammaticalization while the latter includes both grammaticalization and exaptation processes.² In this article, the definition of grammaticalization proposed by Hopper and Traugott (2003: 213) is adopted: ‘a robust tendency for lexical items and constructions to be used in certain linguistic contexts to

serve grammatical functions, and once grammaticalized, to be used to further develop new grammatical functions’.

2. Disposal constructions

2.1 Historical sketch

What is known as the ‘disposal form’ (*chùzhìshì*) or the *bǎ* 把-construction in Chinese has the following syntactic configuration: NP_{1(Agent)} – Object Marker – NP_{2(Patient)} – VP, where the object marker is a preposition. This marker is typically *bǎ* in contemporary Standard Mandarin Chinese, while an array of other forms is found in the other main dialect groups belonging to Sinitic (see §2.2 below). It creates a strong contrast to one of the basic word orders in Chinese languages of S–V–O; similarly for its constructional meaning which expresses high transitivity. This is manifested by the requirement for a clearly interpretable change of state for the referential object NP (describing how it has been ‘disposed of’ and hence the label in Chinese linguistics).

The disposal markers seen in vernacular texts of the Medieval Chinese period (2nd – 13th centuries) are typically deverbal prepositions based on the V₁ position in serial verb constructions of the form: (NP₀[SUBJECT]) – V₁[TAKE] – NP₁ – V₂ – (NP₂). They first began to appear in the Late Han period (1st – 3rd) and included *qǔ* ‘to take’取, *jiāng* 將 ‘to guide, lead, take’, *bǎ* 把 ‘to grasp, hold’, *chí* 持 ‘to grasp, hold’, and *zhuō* 捉 ‘to clutch, hold, seize’. Thus, the morphological forms used to mark the direct object all derive from verbs of taking, a classical source for adpositional direct object markers (see Lord 1993, Heine & Kuteva 2002). Two examples follow of these serial verb constructions, source of the disposal forms: (1) contains a second postverbal object NP₂, while (2) does not:

(1) *qǔ yī dà hǎishuǐ jiāoguàn qí shēn*
 take one big seawater pour 3SG body

‘(He) took a large amount of seawater to pour over his body.’

(2) *zuì bǎ zhūyú zǐxì kan*
 drunk take dogwood carefully look

‘Drunk, (he) took the dogwood (and) looked (at it) carefully.’

The direct object of V₂ coded by NP₂ in (1) could later be omitted in cases where it coded the identical referent to NP₁, as Peyraube has argued (1989a), providing examples such as (3) where the NP₂ is a pronoun coreferential with NP₁:

(3) *rǔ jiāng cǐ rén ānxu shā zhī wú sǔn pī ròu*
 2SG take DEM man careful kill 3SG NEG damage skin flesh

‘Take this man (and) kill him carefully without damaging (his) skin and flesh.’

The process which then played a crucial role in the development of these disposal constructions was the grammaticalization from V > Preposition, producing examples of the type given in (4) or (5), where *jiāng* can no longer be interpreted as a verb meaning ‘to take’:

(4) *xián cháng bǎ qín nòng*
 leisure often OM lute play

‘In (my) spare time (I) often played the lute.’

(5) *shí zhū bǐqiū jiāng cǐ bǎi Fó*
 at.that.time PL monk OM DEM tell Buddha

‘At that time, the monks narrated this to Buddha.’

This occurred after the synchronic derivation had taken place involving omission of a coreferential NP₂. To summarize, the synchronic change

- (i) (NP₀) – V₁(TAKE) – NP₁ – V₂ – NP₂ → NP₀ – V₁(TAKE) – NP₁ – V₂
 where NP₂ = NP₁ and TAKE = any verb in this semantic field

was followed by the diachronic change:

- (ii) NP₀ – V₁(TAKE) – NP₁ – V₂ > NP₀ – Preposition(<TAKE) – NP₁ – V.

Other processes may have played a role in the birth of this disposal construction: an analogical process with certain ditransitive constructions,³ involving the preposition *yǐ* 以 in Classical Chinese and verbs of giving (*yǐ* – NP₁(direct object) – V_(GIVE) – NP₂(indirect object)), and, as has been argued recently in an intriguing new and original hypothesis by Cao Guangshun and Yu Hsiao-jung (2000), the influence of Late Han Buddhist texts translated from Sanskrit using the verb *qǔ* 取 ‘to take’ as a real disposal marker, as in (6):

- (6) NP₁ – *qǔ* – NP₂(Object) – V (– Complement)

zhū rénmin qǔ wǒ wǎng shā

PL people OM 1SG unjust sentence.to.death

‘All the people unjustly sentenced me to death.’

2.2 Sources for disposal markers in contemporary Sinitic languages

On the basis of available synchronic descriptions of Sinitic languages, three main lexical domains as sources for disposal markers in Sinitic languages can be discerned, testifying to great diversity in terms of their hyponyms. These are:

- (i) **Verbs of taking and holding** > object markers, e.g. cognates and synonyms of *bǎ* 把 ‘to take’ as in Standard Mandarin; *jiāng* 將 ‘to take, lead’ used in formal registers of Hakka, Southern Min and Cantonese; *nɔ⁵³* 拿 ‘take, hold’ in Shanghainese (Wu); *na²* 拿 and *laq⁷* 搨 in Gan dialects.

- (ii) **Verbs of giving and helping** > object markers, e.g. cognates and synonyms of *gěi* 給 ‘to give’ as in Xiang and Southwestern Mandarin; *bāng* 幫 ‘to help’ in many Wu, Hui and Xiang dialects, *dei¹¹* 代 ‘to help’ in Wenzhou (Wu).

- (iii) **Comitatives** > object markers, e.g. cognates and synonyms of *kā(ŋ)* 共 in Min dialects, *t’ung¹¹* 同 and *lau¹¹* 搨 in Hakka dialects, *tse²⁵* 則 in Shaoxing (Wu); *gēn* 跟 in non-standard Mandarin and Wu dialects, all serving as the comitative ‘with’, itself evolved from verbs meaning ‘to share, to gather’, ‘to mix’ or ‘to accompany’.

As can be readily perceived, the first lexical domain with verbs of taking and holding is the only one which corresponds to the common source identified in the documented history of Chinese. As described above, the stages of grammaticalization have been analyzed for this

pathway in detail. Regarding the two additional sources of *give/help* verbs and comitatives, Chappell (2006, 2007) proposes that grammaticalization into object markers proceeds via a dative/beneficiary stage for both. The case of the comitative receives additional support from the earliest known historical documents for Chinese dialects, namely 16th century Southern Min materials which permit identification of the dative/beneficiary role as the site for reanalysis, having first passed through an intermediary stage as a generalized oblique marker (Chappell, Peyraube and Wu to appear). Three main pathways of grammaticalization are thus proposed for each of the lexical domains represented above:

- (i) TAKE/HOLD > direct object marker
- (ii) GIVE/HELP > beneficiary/dative > direct object marker
- (iii) VERB > COMITATIVE > oblique → beneficiary/dative > direct object marker

For (ii), it is well-known that verbs of giving develop into markers of the dative or beneficiary (Peyraube 1988). In the former V₁ position of a serial verb construction, they are realized as prepositions marking the beneficiary ‘for’ or datives ‘to’ in Sinitic languages, from whence they develop into direct object markers. Although this does not appear to be a common pathway, it is reminiscent of the closely related semantic change from DATIVE > ACCUSATIVE in Indo-European languages, described in Heine & Kuteva (2002).

Comitatives used as markers of direct objects are even more rare cross-linguistically. They have not been generally described as being able to develop into accusative or object markers (Heine & Kuteva 2002). Sinitic languages therefore provide evidence for a special pathway, apparently not yet attested elsewhere. In written Mandarin, the use of *gēn* < ‘to

follow’ as a comitative preposition can only be first detected in 18th century literature (see Liu & Peyraube 1994), suggesting that its synchronic dialectal use as an object marker is likely to be a quite recent development, possibly only from the 19th century. In contrast to this, the use of comitative *kā(ŋ)* in Southern Min as an object marker may be much earlier, with fledgling examples found in typical bridge contexts of 16th literature (Chappell, Peyraube & Wu, to appear).

3. Passives, causatives and verbs of giving

3.1 Historical sketch

Syntactic passives in Sinitic generally share the basic form of NP_{1(PATIENT)} – Preposition(<V1) – NP_{2(AGENT)} – V₂. Three groups of prepositional passive markers can be discerned in the history of Chinese which correspond to several of the lexical domains listed as sources by Heine & Kuteva (2002), including *suffer*, *get*, *see* and causative verbs.

- (i) Archaic (11th – 2nd BC) and Pre-Medieval Chinese (1st BC–1st AD)

preposition *yú* 于 ‘by’, *wéi* 為 ‘make’, *jiàn* 見 ‘see’

- (ii) Medieval Chinese (2nd – 13th AD)

bèi 被 ‘suffer’, *ái* 挨 ‘suffer’, *zāo*(*shòu*) 遭受 ‘suffer’, *mèng* 蒙 ‘cover’ and (8) *shòu* 受 ‘receive’, *yǔ* 與 (与) ‘give’, *jiào* 教 ‘instruct’

- (iii) Modern Mandarin (13th – present)

qǐ 乞 ‘give’, *zhuó* 着/著 ‘suffer’, *ràng* 讓 ‘let’, *jiào* 叫 ‘tell, order’, *gěi* 給 ‘give’, and *bèi* 被 ‘suffer’ in formal and written registers.

The earliest passive structure, VERB + *yú* 於 + AGENT was formed with a postverbal PP containing the preposition *yú* ‘at’, ‘by’, ‘to’, and was in common use throughout the Archaic period (11th–2nd BC). It was later superseded by two new competing agentless forms with *jiàn* 見–VERB < ‘to see’ and *wéi* 為–VERB < ‘to be, become’ during the Late Archaic period (5th–2nd BC), both of which occupied first position in a V₁–V₂ series. They subsequently grammaticalized into preverbal auxiliaries. Only *wéi* developed a variant with an agent noun. They remained in common use until the Early Medieval period (2nd–6th centuries AD). An example of the agentive variant of the *wéi* passive is given below:

- (7) *dào shū jiāng wéi tiānxià liè*
dao doctrine FUT PASS world tear.in.pieces
 ‘The doctrine of the *dao* will be torn into pieces by the world.’

Another new form, the *bèi* 被 passive (<‘suffer’), began to emerge in the Pre-Medieval period as an agentless form. The following example serendipitously includes two parallel V₁–V₂ structures with both the *bèi* and the *jiàn* (<‘see’) passives:

- (8) *bèi* (auxiliary verb)–VERB:
Zēngzǐ jiàn yí ér yín, Bó Qí bèi zhú ér gē
Zengzi PASS suspect but recite.poem Bo Qi PASS exile but sing
 ‘Zengzi recited poems when he was suspected, Bo Qi sang when he was exiled.’

In Peyraube's view (1989b), there are essentially two different developments for this verb, one for its serial verb use in $V_1(bèi) + V_2$, and the other for its use in $V_1(bèi) - NP_{(AGENT)} - V_2$ ($- C$) where C is another constituent. A process of grammaticalization affects only this second use, with reanalysis of the verb, *bèi*, as a preposition introducing the agent being completed by the end of the Early Medieval period, that is, towards the end of 6th century AD. This new agentive form of the *bèi* passive, modeled on the *wéi* construction (another case, probably of analogical change), subsequently became the dominant one during the Tang dynasty (618–907) in Late Medieval Chinese.

- (9) *Pídài bèi zéi dào qù*
 bag PASS thief steal grab
 'The leather bag was stolen by bandits.'

During the Modern period from the 13th century onwards, *bèi* became relegated more and more to the written language.

3.2. Sources of passive markers in contemporary Sinitic languages

The six principle sources of passive markers in Sinitic languages comprise the lexical domains of the following verbs (i) *give*; (ii) *suffer*; (iii) *touch, be in contact with*; (iv) causative verbs including *tell, call, let*; (v) *wait* and (vi) *get/obtain, take*. The majority of Sinitic languages use a highly diverse group of markers based on verbs of giving to introduce the agent NP. In the northern zones for Mandarin dialects, the use of causative verbs is prevalent, particularly *jiào* 'tell, make' but also *ràng* 'let' while *zhuó* 'to suffer' is the typical

marker for the majority of Southwestern Mandarin dialects (Li Lan 2006). The basic form for these passive constructions, both agentive and adversative in nature, is:

$NP_{1(PATIENT)} - \text{Preposition}_{PASSIVE} (<V_{1(GIVE)}) - NP_{2(AGENT)} - V_2$

exemplified by the Hengshan dialect of the Xiang group (Hunan):

- (10) $t^h a^{33}$ $t i \partial \eta^{33}$ ηr^{24} $f u^{24}$ $t s \partial e^{24}$ $t^h a^{33}$ $i \tilde{a}^{11}$ $m a^{24}$
 3SG today will PASS(<'give') 3SG father blame
 'He will be blamed by his father today.'

To account for the reanalysis of *give* verbs into both dative and passive prepositions, we have proposed that there are at least two different pathways of grammaticalization (Chappell & Peyraube 2006):

- (i) $V_{[+GIVE]} > \text{dative marker}$
- (ii) $V_{[+GIVE]} > \text{causative verb} > \text{passive}$

First, the syntactic configuration for the datives is different from that for the passive and causative constructions in most Sinitic languages: prototypical dative markers follow the main verb whereas the causative verbs and passive exponents precede it. Second, this hypothesis appears to conform to available historical data which show that the causative use of these verbs appeared prior to the passive one. Third, causative verbs from sources other than verbs of giving similarly develop into passive markers (but not into dative prepositions). This applies, for example, to *jiào*

‘tell, make’ or *ràng* ‘let’ used as passive markers in contemporary Standard Mandarin Chinese.⁴

Crosslinguistically, there is ample evidence for the association between verbs of giving and dative prepositions or verbs of giving and causative verbs (Newman 1996). However, it is very rare to find verbs of giving directly developing into passive markers. Apart from Sinitic languages, only a small number of Southeast Asian languages use this pathway, such as certain peninsular Western Malay dialects in their colloquial form (Zhang Min 2000, Yap & Iwasaki 2007).

Since the development directly from a verb of giving into a passive marker is not attested, while it is quite common to find passive markers directly grammaticalized from causatives, we propose the following implicational universal:

If a language has a passive marker whose origin is in a verb of giving, then it necessarily has a causative verb, realised by the same form, which has its source in the same verb of giving.

[PASSIVE MARKER < GIVE] ⊃ [CAUSATIVE < GIVE]

4. Classifiers

A classifier (CLF) in Sinitic languages is a word which theoretically must occur after a demonstrative and/or number (NUM), or some other quantifiers, and before a noun (N):

- (11) (*zhèi*) *sān* *běn* *shū*
 (this) three CLF book
 ‘(these) three books’

This definition does not say anything, however, about the semantic role of the CLF; nor does it allow the important distinction to be made between a CLF and a measure word (MW).

Measure words can indicate: (i) standards for length, weight, volume, and area; (ii) collectives; (iii) containers; (iv) parts of wholes. They are probably a universal feature of languages, while classifiers are not.

Chinese classifiers did not appear earlier than the Former Han period, circa 2nd BC, increasing in use during the Early Medieval (2nd – 6th), before becoming prominent under the Late Medieval period (7th – 13th).

Seven patterns, with either measure words or classifiers, are attested throughout the different stages of Chinese, from the Pre-Archaic period (14th – 11th BC) to the Late Medieval period: (i) NUM – N, (ii) N – NUM, (iii) N₁ – NUM – N₂, (iv) N – NUM – MW, (v) N – NUM – CLF, (vi) NUM – MW – N, and (vii) NUM – CLF – N.

In the oracle bone inscriptions of Pre-Archaic Chinese (14th – 11th), the pattern NUM – N is by far the most common pattern and is probably also the oldest. Patterns (ii), (iii) and (iv) are also attested.

(12) *yǒu* *yī* *niú* *Zǔ Yǐ*
 sacrifice one bovine Ancestor.Yi
 ‘(One should) sacrifice one bovine to Ancestor Yi.’

By the time of Late Archaic Chinese (5th–2nd), the N–NUM–MW pattern has grown in importance, while NUM–N has the highest frequency. The most interesting development in this period is undeniably the appearance of the prenominal measure word NUM–MW–N, which did not exist in Early Archaic.

- (13) *yóu yǐ yī bēi shuǐ jiù yī chē xīn*
 be.like with one glass_{MW} water rescue one cart_{MW} firewood
zhī huǒ yě
 LIG fire PRT
 ‘It is like fighting a fire in a cartful of firewood with a glass of water.’

The following word order change must thus have occurred during Late Archaic of N–NUM–MW > NUM–MW–N where the predicate NUM–MW in pattern (iv) (N–NUM–MW) is reanalyzed as the modifier of the head noun in pattern (vi) (NUM–MW–N).⁵ In Pre-Medieval Chinese (Han dynasty: 1st BC - 1st AD), this pattern steadily gains ground.

The most important issue for the Pre-Medieval period is in fact to ascertain whether individual classifiers had come into existence or not. This indeed appears to be the case with regard to the postnominal structure, N–NUM–CLF:

- (14) *jīzǐ wǔ méi*
 egg five CLF
 ‘five eggs’

A close examination of the Han inscriptions on bamboo or wood tablets – which represent a rich corpus excavated from ruins at a border garrison in Northwest China – does in fact reveal that classifiers were not rare at this time (see Drocourt 1993). It is well-known that there is a division among the world languages between those with morphologically marked plurals and no classifiers on the one hand, and those with classifiers but no plural markers on the

other. Peyraube (1998) suggested that the appearance of true classifiers in China might have been triggered by the loss of a plurality marker in Archaic Chinese, realised as infix ‘-r’ (for the reconstruction of such an infix, see Sagart, 1993).

Every classifier has its own history, but they all derive from nouns (or verbs in a very few cases) through a process of grammaticalization which bleaches them of their full lexical meaning. For instance, the classifiers *méi* 枚, *kǒu* 口, *tóu* 头, already attested under the Han, come from nouns meaning ‘tree-trunk’, ‘mouth’ and ‘head’ respectively and were used as a general classifier in the first case, and mainly for animals in the case of the latter two.

By the Early Medieval period (2nd–6th), the classifiers are not yet obligatory when used in quantified NPs, even though the increase in their use dates from this period. However, they are still used in a postnominal position. It is only in the Late Medieval (7th–13th) period that the NUM–CLF–N pattern becomes widespread with 70 % of quantified NPs involving the systematic use of classifiers.

- (15) *chéng yī duǒ hēi yún*
ride one CLF black cloud
‘(They) rode on a black cloud.’

Note also that by this time *méi* is no longer the general classifier. It has been replaced by *gè* 个 which has an extended use with all kinds of noun, especially abstract ones, but also persons, as in:

- (16) *jiāoxué bā wàn gè tǔdi*
 teach eight ten.thousand CLF disciple
 ‘(He) taught eighty thousand disciples.’

Finally, besides being used in NPs involving numerals, some classifiers (mainly *gè*) can also be used in the prenominal pattern with a demonstrative, a new development, beginning in the 10th century: DEM–CLF–N.

- (17) *cǐ gè dìyù-zhōng yǒu yī Qīngtí fūrén yǐ fǒu*
 DEM CLF hell-in there.be one Qingti madamyes no
 ‘Is there a Madam Qingti in this hell?’

The change in word order proposed above for measure words of N–NUM–MW > NUM–MW–N, ensuing upon a reanalysis of predicative NUM–MW as a noun modifier, similarly applies to the classifiers:

N–NUM–CLF > NUM–CLF–N

Thus, by process of analogy with the form containing a pre-nominal MW, already dominant for many centuries, the NUM–CLF was also reanalyzed as a modifier of the head noun (for details, see Peyraube 1998).

From Late Medieval to the Modern period (19th century), classifiers diversified and, besides their role of quantification, also took on the function of qualification/classification. Interestingly, in certain dialects of Northern Chinese, there is a new

tendency to lose this function of qualification/classification, due to a process of lexical unification of all classifiers into just one: *gè*.

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¹ For a definition of empty words and full words, as well as for a standard classification of these two categories, see Zhu (1982). See also Cao Guangshun (1995) for Medieval Chinese.

² For definitions and a detailed discussion concerning analogy, reanalysis, grammaticalization and degrammaticalization, see Peyraube (2005).

³ See Mei Tsu-lin (1990), Wei Pei-chuan (1997), Wu Fuxiang (2003) for detailed discussions.

⁴ See Jian Lansheng (1999) and Jiang Shaoyu (2002).

⁵ On the problem of word order change and grammaticalization in Chinese, see Chaofen Sun (1996).