

## **A contrastive study of the interaction between non-ditransitive verbs and the ditransitive construction in German and Chinese**

### **1. Introduction**

This paper attempts to tease out mechanisms of the interaction between non-ditransitive verbs and the ditransitive construction in German and Chinese within the framework of Construction Grammar (cf. Goldberg 1995, 2006). Based on Xu (2004, pp. 310–312), Malchukov/Haspelmath/Comrie (2010, p. 1) and Willems (2020, p. 152), two relevant terms, namely ditransitive verb and double object sentence, are defined as follows:

- a) Ditransitive verb: a trivalent verb with the ability to simultaneously take two objects with semantic features similar to recipient and patient;
- b) Double object sentence: a sentence with a ditransitive or non-ditransitive verb and two objects as parts of its predicate.

The German and Chinese ditransitive verbs addressed in this paper occur in the following unmarked word order within a declarative sentence together with the subject and object participants: NP<sub>1</sub>(agent) V NP<sub>2</sub>(recipient) NP<sub>3</sub>(patient).

### **2. Interaction between non-ditransitive verbs and the ditransitive construction in German**

Welke (2009, pp. 98–103; 2011, pp. 202–213; 2019, pp. 247–254) argues for the licensing of free datives in double object sentences by the ditransitive construction. Willems (2020, p. 170) points out the following semantic features, which can be considered at most as three necessary but insufficient conditions for a monotransitive verb to enter a double object sentence: (a) “agentive verb”; (b) “(physically) affected object”; (c) “affected [beneficiary]” (cf. Helbig 1981, p. 327; Wegener 1985, pp. 68, 74 f., 78; 1991, pp. 82 f., 85; Hens 1995, pp. 158 f.; Welke 2009, p. 100; 2011, p. 212; 2019, pp. 252 f.; Wang 2017, pp. 25, 30). Based on previous studies (Wegener 1985, pp. 66–72, 74 f., 99, 263–268, 320; Hens 1995, p. 184; Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997, pp. 1340 f., 1343, etc.), this paper enhances the cross-linguistic validity of condition (a) by focusing on the semantic relation between the verb and the syntactically realized NP<sub>1</sub>, specifies condition (b) by including type (iii), (iv) und (v) as another three cases of affectedness of the object, and adds the inactive feature of the dative referent to condition (c), thus yielding the following cluster of semantic features as an extension and concretization of the semantic conditions summarized by Willems (2020, p. 170):

- a) The verb action is caused directly by the NP<sub>1</sub>-referent;
- b) The verb action affects or effects the NP<sub>3</sub>-referent in such a way that (i) it is produced or destroyed, (ii) its state/location is either changed or maintained, (iii) something comes into physical contact with it without changing or maintaining its state/location, (iv) it bears an objectively existent influence from the verb action which neither pri-

marily causes a specific physical contact nor inherently implies a result, or (v) it is perceived subjectively by the speaker to bear an influence from the verb action;

- c) The verb action can benefit or harm the inactive NP<sub>2</sub>-referent in a certain way.

### **3. Interaction between non-ditransitive verbs and the ditransitive construction in Chinese**

Based primarily on the classification of Chinese double object sentences in Ma (1983) and Zhang (2007), this paper addresses a wide range of double object sentences in Chinese. It provides a detailed analysis of the interaction between non-ditransitive verbs and the ditransitive construction with a particular focus on the more complex fusion process of participant and argument roles as well as various semantic adjustments to the argument roles. Two embedding cases of non-ditransitive verbs are differentiated according to semantic change in the argument role of the construction:

- a) Verbal-constructural interaction without any semantic changes to the argument role of the construction;
- b) Verbal-constructural interaction involving semantic changes to the argument role of the construction.

The first case includes non-ditransitive double object sentences with the following meanings: GIVE, TAKE, DEPRIVE, explicit GIVE with implied TAKE, explicit TAKE with implied GIVE and NAME. The second case includes non-ditransitive double object sentences coding locative, causative and resultative meanings as well as the meanings of stimulus, opportunity and exchange.

The double object sentence with a non-referential object is discussed separately since it arises from a reinterpretation of other types of double object sentences (cf. Lei 2012). By presenting sentences permitting ambiguous readings from corpus data, this paper tries to demonstrate that this type of double object sentence arises not only from double object sentences with the TAKE meaning as claimed by Lei (*ibid.*), but also from causative and resultative double object sentences which show semantic parallels to the prototypical GIVE meaning of the ditransitive construction.

### **4. Comparison of interaction mechanisms in German and Chinese**

The similarities and differences between German and Chinese in terms of verbal-constructural interaction mechanisms can be summarized as follows. Firstly, although the three semantic features mentioned in section 2 are also shared by the Chinese ditransitive construction with its prototypical GIVE meaning, they are inherited by non-ditransitive double object sentences in Chinese to varying degrees, depending on the syntactic and/or semantic properties of the verbs and objects, the given context as well as certain types of double object sentences. As one of the semantic features of the ditransitive construction, the transfer meaning (cf. Lin 2015, p. 123) is inherited by the German non-ditransitive double object sentences in an abstracted form of transferring a certain benefit or harm to the NP<sub>2</sub>-referent (cf. Wang 2017, pp. 24–26, 28–31, 59–62) while it is also passed on to most types of Chinese non-ditransitive double object sentences. The only exception is the locative double object sentence with an intransitive verb because in this type of sentence,

the only remaining component of the transfer meaning is its directionality while its agentive component is lost. Therefore, it is the directionality of the ditransitive construction that is always inherited by non-ditransitive double object sentences in both languages.

Secondly, the analyses of German and Chinese show that the ditransitive construction has two functions regarding argument licensing, namely to introduce an argument not bound to the verbal valency and to enable two participants of the same non-ditransitive verb to occur simultaneously in the postverbal positions of a double object sentence. While the Chinese ditransitive construction exhibits both functions, the German ditransitive construction lacks the second one.

Thirdly, only the recipient of the German ditransitive construction is reinterpreted as a beneficiary in the process of interaction with monotransitive verbs. In contrast, both object argument roles of the Chinese ditransitive construction can either remain unchanged or be reinterpreted. The recipient can be reinterpreted as locative, patient and causee, whereas the patient can be regarded as stimulus, resultative or instrument. Furthermore, while the recipient of the German ditransitive construction simply receives a new semantic role, the recipient and patient of the Chinese ditransitive construction can, in addition, be assigned the participant roles of the verb.

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