

A contrastive study of the GIVE-morphemes in German and Chinese from the perspective of Cognitive Grammar

geben and *gěi* are the basic GIVE-morphemes in German and Chinese respectively. They not only denote the GIVE-act as verbs, but have also undergone diverse processes of meaning extension or grammaticalization. In German, *geben* can be used monotonically (“cause something to exist; produce, yield; organize; play the role of ...”), reflexively (“act or behave in a certain way; subside and stop; arise, appear”) and impersonally (“there is/are, exist”). In Chinese, *gěi* functions as the markers of recipient, beneficiary, maleficiary, goal, patient, causative, passive and mediopassive and also emphasizes the speaker’s intention when combined with the 1st person singular pronoun *wǒ*.

The GIVE-morphemes in German and Chinese have been studied relatively intensively within German and Chinese Linguistics respectively as well as in the cross-linguistic framework of Newman (1996). However, on the one hand, the language-specific studies still lack a contrastive perspective uniting the GIVE-morpheme in German and Chinese in a uniform framework. On the other hand, Newman’s (1996) cross-linguistic study within the framework of Cognitive Grammar neither exhausts all the uses of the GIVE-morphemes and all the meaning components within the respective uses nor does it provide well-founded explanations with adequate consideration of diachronic aspects regarding some uses of the GIVE-morphemes. In particular, the first point refers to the different meanings of the monotonically and impersonal uses of *geben* in German and the uses of *gěi* as markers of maleficiary, goal and mediopassive as well as a further possibility of extending the ditransitive construction to the serial verb construction in Chinese, whereas the second point mainly refers to the uses of *gěi* as a disposal and passive marker. Therefore, it is nonetheless necessary to perform as comprehensive an analysis as possible in order to 1) close the research gaps in previous studies, 2) better understand German and Chinese from a comparative perspective and 3) further refine the cross-linguistic investigation of the GIVE-morphemes by taking more diachronic aspects into consideration and applying the frequency analysis in corpus linguistics.

From the perspective of Langacker’s Cognitive Grammar, this article initially aims to extract the construal types of the GIVE-act on the basis of the polysemy and grammatical multifunctionality of the basic GIVE morpheme in German and Chinese while also taking diachronic development into consideration. Furthermore, it attempts to reveal the preference for the construal of the GIVE-act regarding the literal/quasi-literal GIVE and figurative GIVE through an empirical corpus study.

According to Newman (1996), GIVE is defined as an act of ownership changing whereby the giver passes control over a thing to the recipient. This basic conceptual structure is reflected in the ditransitive usage of *geben* in German and *gěi* in Chinese with their basic lexical meaning. The GIVE-morpheme describing the concrete change of ownership is classified as literal GIVE. If the thing is no longer a concrete entity, but an abstract one, or if the giver/recipient is not a concrete person, but a personified or inanimate entity, the GIVE-morpheme is considered a quasi-literal GIVE referring to the change of ownership

in an abstract sense. In contrast to literal/quasi-literal GIVE, the GIVE-morpheme with extended meanings and grammatical functions no longer describes the change of ownership. Therefore, according to the distinction made by Newman (1996) between literal and figurative GIVE, this study also distinguishes the figurative GIVE from the literal/quasi-literal GIVE. The criteria for the distinction are whether the GIVE-morpheme (a) independently (b) describes the change of ownership either in a concrete or an abstract sense. While it is synchronically still quite easy to identify the construal of the GIVE-act regarding literal/quasi-literal GIVE, the construal of the GIVE-act regarding figurative GIVE is synchronically not always transparent. Nevertheless, the construal of the GIVE-act regarding the figurative GIVE remains diachronically real and can be revealed based on the diachronic developments.

The first part of the study takes a closer look at the polysemy and the grammatical multifunctionality of the basic GIVE morpheme in German and Chinese respectively. Based on the diachronic developments, the construal of the GIVE-act regarding figurative GIVE is revealed in detail and presented by adopting the image schema in Cognitive Grammar. In order to generate general types from the diverse construals of the GIVE-act, this study chooses “profiling” as the criterion as all other dimensions of construal (such as specificity, perspective, trajectory/landmark organization etc.) depend either on the uses of the GIVE-morphemes or on their concrete tokens and therefore lack generality and abstractness at a higher level. The construal types in German and Chinese based on the profiled entities are presented in Tabelle 1 and 2.

literal/quasi-literal GIVE:				
1	giver +	thing +	recipient +	2nd act –
	NP ₁ (agent) <i>geben</i> NP ₂ (recipient) NP ₃ (patient) NP ₁ (agent) <i>geben</i> NP ₂ (patient) PP			
2	giver +	thing +	recipient +	2nd act + subsequent
	NP ₁ (agent) <i>geben</i> NP ₂ (recipient) NP ₃ (patient) <i>zu</i> V			
figurativ GIVE:				
1	giver +	thing +	recipient –	2nd act
	NP ₁ (agent) <i>geben</i> NP ₂ (patient) > <i>es gibt</i> NP (theme)			
	NP ₁ (agent) <i>geben</i> NP ₂ (patient) <i>von sich</i> NP(agent) <i>geben sich</i>			

Tab 1. construal types of the GIVE-act in German

As a corpus-based analysis, the second part of the study attempts to determine the token frequency of each literal/quasi-literal use of the GIVE morphemes on the one hand, and to include other construal types of the GIVE-act occurring in actual language usage but that remain unconsidered in reference books and research literature on the other hand. Based on these results, the preference regarding construal of the GIVE-act can be revealed. In order to obtain a representative picture of the GIVE-uses in written and spoken language, this study selects three groups of corpora in the two languages respectively, namely newspaper articles, web texts and verbal communication. Given that the GIVE-verb is one of

the most frequently used verbs, we base our corpus analysis on a random sample of 1000 tokens containing the GIVE-verb for each group of the corpora.

	literal/quasi-literal GIVE:			
1	giver +	thing +	recipient +	2nd act –
	NP ₁ (agent) <i>gěi</i> NP ₂ (recipient) NP ₃ (patient)			
2	giver +	thing +	recipient +	2nd act + subsequent
	NP ₁ (agent) <i>gěi</i> NP ₂ (recipient) NP ₃ (patient) VP			
	figurative GIVE:			
1	giver +	thing –	recipient +	modified act
	recipient-marker (post-VP/postverbal) recipient-marker (pre-VP) > beneficiary-marker > maleficiary/goal-marker, emphatic <i>gěi wǒ</i> , disposal-marker			
2	giver +	thing –	recipient +	subsequent act
	causative-marker > passive-marker			
3	giver	thing –	recipient +	subsequent act
	mediopassive-marker			

Tab 2. construal types of the GIVE-act in Chinese

The results of the corpus study regarding literal/quasi-literal use of *geben* can be summarized as follows: 1. The monotransitive use of *geben* in the construction “NP₁(agent) *geben* NP₂(patient)” with the literal/quasi-literal sense is also found. In addition, the construction “NP₁(agent) *geben* NP₂(recipient)” as well as its passive form also occur in the corpora. 2. The construal types “giver +, thing +, recipient +” and “giver +, thing +, recipient –” occur in all three corpora groups with significantly higher frequencies. 3. Supported by the χ^2 -test, a strong preference for the thing instead of the recipient can be revealed in terms of the literal/quasi-literal use of *geben*.

The results of the corpus study regarding the figurative use of *geben* can be summarized in the following two points: 1. The elliptical construction “(es) *gibt* NP” and the use of *gegeben* as an adjective predicative with the meaning “existing, available” are found as new examples of the construal type “giver -, thing +, recipient –”. 2. It can be summarized that the profiling of the thing is found not only in the use of *gegeben* as an adjective predicative, but also in the four constructions in Tab. 1. Therefore, in terms of the figurative use of *geben*, we can conclude that the thing is more strongly profiled than the recipient.

The results of the corpus study regarding the literal/quasi-literal use of *gěi* can be summarized as follows: 1. Five new construal types are found in the corpora, represented by the constructions “NP₁(agent) *gěi* NP₂(patient)”, “NP₁(agent) *gěi* NP₂(recipient)”, “NP₁(patient) *gěi* NP₂(recipient)”, “NP₁(recipient) *gěi* NP₂(patient)”, “NP(agent) *gěi*” respectively. Furthermore, a new instance of the prototypical construal type “giver +, thing +, recipient +” is found, namely the construction “NP₁(agent) *gěi* NP₂(recipient) *yǐ* NP₃(patient)”. 2. The construal type “giver +, thing +, recipient +, 2. act –” occurs in all three corpora groups with a significantly higher frequency. 3. The thing is only profiled significantly more frequently than the recipient in the corpora of verbal communication, whereas this significance cannot be attested by the χ^2 -test in the newspaper texts and the web texts.

In regard to the figurative uses of *gěi*, it is observed in the corpora of verbal communication that the second NP in the construction “NP₁ *gěi* NP₂ VP” with *gěi* functioning as a marker of recipient, beneficiary, goal, disposal and causative can be omitted. However, this type of ellipsis is still based on the construal type “giver +, thing -, recipient +, modified/subsequent act” or can be seen as its further development. Therefore, based on the construal types summarized in Tab.2, it can be concluded that there is a very strong preference for the recipient in Chinese regarding the figurative uses of *gěi*. Additionally, the profiling of the recipient always correlates with the involvement of another act encoded by the serial verb construction in Chinese.

The final part of the corpus study addresses the question of the semantic features of the patient-NP in the monotransitive use of the literal/quasi-literal GIVE-verb in comparison with its ditransitive use. After performing a series of χ^2 -tests based on the corpus data, the study reveals a significantly stronger tendency in German for construal of the thing as an entity with a higher degree of abstractness, if, in addition to the giver, only the thing is profiled. It is also worth noting that the figurative use of *geben* in the monotransitive construction with the extended meanings such as “cause something to exist; produce, yield; organize; play the role of ...” is not found in the monotransitive use of *gěi*. Therefore, it can be concluded that the construal of the GIVE-act as emergence of an entity caused by another entity is more entrenched in German than in Chinese.

In conclusion, this study presents the following important tendencies: 1. In regard to the literal/quasi-literal GIVE, the preference for the thing is significantly stronger in German than in Chinese. 2. As to the figurative GIVE, diverse construals of the GIVE-act concerning specification, perspectivization and profiling as well as organization of entities can be observed in the two languages. But we can still observe the overall tendency that in German the thing and in Chinese the recipient play a central role in the diachronic development of the GIVE-morphemes. 3. As to the literal/quasi-literal GIVE, if, in addition to the giver, only the thing is profiled, the latter is clearly construed more frequently as an abstract entity in German than in Chinese.