

Tanzen lernen ‘to dance to learn’ and xuéxí yóuyǒng ‘to learn to swim’: Verb-verb constructions with “simple infinitive complements” in German and “predicate objects” in Chinese

Infinitive verbs such as *lernen* ‘learn’, *lehren* ‘teach’, *lieben* ‘love’ and *gehen* ‘go’, etc. with simple infinitive complements in German and main verbs with predicate objects in Chinese create specific verb-verb complexes where two verb forms can appear consecutively. The question is whether the governed verb form, i.e. the simple infinitive complement or the predicate object respectively, implicitly functions as a noun or a verb. This article reports on a comparative investigation into the correspondence of word categories between the German simple infinitive complement and the Chinese predicate object, along with their syntactic status in these verb constructions.

Chapter 2 analyses the correspondence between the German simple infinitive complement and the Chinese predicate object regarding word categories. The German simple infinitive inherently represents a word form with dual word class interpretation; it is morphologically and syntactically interpreted as being both verbal and nominal. The interpretation of the word class of the simple infinitive complement requires a comprehensive evaluation based on syntactic-distributional criteria, such as adding adjectival or genitive attributes, and coherence tests, etc. Unlike German infinitives, not all Chinese verb forms serving as a predicate object can be interpreted as both verbal and nominal. “Regular verbs” in Chinese maintain their verbal characteristics as predicate objects, illustrated through tests like adverbial embedding or additional complements. According to corpora approximately 23% of all Chinese verbs, when used as predicate objects, correspond to the German simple infinitive complement in terms of word category. These are classified as words with a dual word class, allowing for both verbal and nominal interpretations that contextually emerge through tests.

In chapter 3, the syntactic status of the simple infinitive and the predicate object in German and Chinese verb constructions respectively is examined in more detail. It is demonstrated that both could serve not only as complements/objects but also as predicates in certain circumstance. The infinitive forms a complex predicate or a “verb particle-verb complex” with the main verb while the predicate object functions as a predicate/predicate part of an embedded object clause or as the core of the verb structure. This is closely tied to the governing main verb and the word class interpretation of the infinitive and predicate object.

In section 3.1, the object status of the infinitive and the predicate object is established. For infinitive verbs of the type *lernen* and *lieben*, it is observed that the simple infinitive, acting as an accusative object, is movable, interrogative and replaceable by pronouns, allowing for a nominal interpretation. In contrast, the Chinese predicate object, regardless of its word class and the governing main verb, confirms its object status through topicalization tests, omission tests and ellipsis tests.

Section 3.2 explores the syntactic status of the infinitive, especially with infinitive verbs of the *lernen* type, where the verbal infinitive can be replaced by a *zu* ‘to’ infinitive. Within the topological sentence model, the infinitive verb and the infinitive can be directly juxtaposed in the final position, with the infinite verb and its complement positioned in the post-field, pre-field or middle field. This results in either a complex sentence with two separate clauses, each having its argument structure, or a simple sentence. In a simple sentence, the infinitive verbs collectively constitute the verbal complex / complex predicate. This results in a shift in the verb’s valency position, with the objective complement of the infinitive becoming the object of the verbal complex. In the case of *lieben* types, although the simple infinitive can be replaced by the *zu* infinitive, indicative of a clearly verbal infinitive, the sentences with a simple infinitive and *zu* infinitive are not equivalent concerning the “control” and “orientation” of generative grammar, i.e. the subject referent of the infinitive. Therefore, it is argued that the simple infinitive in *lieben* types is nominal and cannot form a complex predicate. In combination with the verbs of motion *gehen*, *fahren* ‘drive’ and *kommen* ‘come’, the verbal simple infinitive complement indicates an “abstract direction determination”, especially when the directional adverbial required by the valency of the motion verb also appear simultaneously. The verbs retain their original and complete valency, not merging into a complex predicate, as the argument structure remains unchanged.

In section 3.3, the case is made for the status of the predicate object when connected to certain main verbs as a predicate/predicate part of an embedded object clause. It is demonstrated that, when connected with verb types like *dǎsuàn* ‘plan’, the predicate object can be queried for both its object status and, using the interrogative word *zěnyàng* ‘how’, its predicate status. This indicates the predicate status of the predicate object since, in Chinese, the predicate and the adverbial determination of manner and degree can usually be queried with *zěnyàng*. If the possibility as an adverbial is excluded, the predicate object functions solely as the predicate of an embedded object clause, where the subject of the embedded clause is absent in the surface structure. This resembles cases of subject control in German infinitive constructions, where the PRO-subject of the embedded clause is co-indexed with the subject of the matrix clause. It is further argued that, with other main verbs categorized as “psychological verbs” in Chinese, having perception-related and emotional semantics, an embedded object clause is also feasible, where the predicate object also functions as the predicate or predicate part of the embedded clause. It is emphasized that, in the above-mentioned cases, the predicate object must be interpreted verbally.

In section 3.4, we delve into the status of the simple infinitive and the predicate object in specific constructions. Certain pairings of main verbs with the simple infinitive in German and the predicate object in Chinese bring about constructional changes with nuanced semantic meanings, thus altering the status of the infinitive and predicate object alike. A corpus analysis reveals a distinctive pattern with the verb *gehen*, which, unlike other motion verbs, frequently appears with a location specification when connected with a simple infinitive. In this construction, often with specific adverbial modifications, *gehen* nearly loses its inherent “movement” semantics. It forms a verbal complex or semantic unit with the infinitive, expressing habitual activities, future or firmly planned actions and imbued with an ingressive meaning. We suggest that in these constructions with the simple infinitive, *gehen* also constitutes a complex predicate. According to generative syntax,

it is argued that the simple infinitive in these constructions with *gehen* constitutes a “verb particle-verb complex”, where the simple infinitive functions as a verb particle, and *gehen* is in a local domain with the infinitive, rather than a functional relationship. *Gehen* retains its status as a motion verb with main verb characteristics, directly connected to the simple infinitive without any intervening functional projection. The complex jointly manages the argument structure and exhibits idiosyncratic properties under certain conditions, further supporting the role of the simple infinitive in *gehen* constructions as part of the predicate.

In Chinese verb-predicate object connections, especially with certain verbs like *gǎn* ‘dare’ as the main verb, structural and semantic changes are evident. When combined with specific predicate objects, the verb *gǎn* no longer takes semantic precedence. The structure shifts from the notion of “having courage to do something” to “being sure to make a judgement”. This transformation is attributed to constructionalization, where the meaning is no longer literally derived from the structure but must be understood in the context of the construction. The main verb *gǎn* changes from a main verb into a modifying element, akin to an adverbial, complementing and elucidating the meaning of the predicate object. The verb-object structure evolves into an adverbial-verb structure. Tests indicate that the predicate object no longer exhibits object properties. Modified by the adverbial, the predicate object becomes the core of the verb structure.

In the final chapter, the lexicalization of both verb combinations and the potential phenomenon of grammaticalization are addressed. Among various combinations of infinitive verbs and simple infinitives in German, the combinations *kennenlernen* ‘get to know’, *spazieren gehen* ‘go for a walk’ and *sitzenbleiben* ‘repeat a class at school’ exhibit a distinctly lexicalized character. Their word properties manifest themselves in aspects like transferred meaning, complementability as a whole and spelling, etc. Due to the mobility and separability of these combinations, the full verb character of the base verb as opposed to a functional head and the use of verbal infinitives as the first component of the complex, we classify these lexicalized cases as verb-particle-verb complexes rather than verb compounds. The simple infinitives are simultaneously considered as verb particles/predicate parts, representing one of the possible statuses of the simple infinitive. In Chinese, our focus is on the grammaticalization phenomenon of the main verb from a spatial to a temporal and to an abstract category/grammatical marker in specific verbs like the *jìngxíng* ‘perform’ type in combination with predicate objects. Throughout this process, the main verb gradually loses its original lexical meaning as a full verb and gradually grammaticalizes into an element with the character of an auxiliary while the associated predicate object, as the core of the verb structure, assumes the main semantics of the verb structure.