

# Grammaticalization of Transfer Verbs in Mandarin Chinese<sup>\*</sup>

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**Abstract**—In Mandarin Chinese, historical changes in serial verb constructions have played an important role in the development of grammaticalization. In traditional analyses, few studies have been conducted to investigate connections between the lexical use and grammatical use of a given item (Yin, 2004). The case/voice markers in Mandarin have not been systematically investigated. This study seeks to fill these gaps and systematically investigates grammaticalization of typical Mandarin case/voice markers. The results of the study show that typical case/voice markers in Mandarin have been derived from transfer verbs and that the grammaticalization of Mandarin transfer verbs is not totally random, but motivated. Transfer verbs typically reflect human interactions and manipulations with physical objects, and thus, they can be good candidates to be utilized to indicate interactive relations. It is argued that employing transfer verbs as case/voice markers is motivated by the concepts of motion and transitivity as well (Yin, 2004). The paper demonstrates that in grammaticalization the semantics of lexical items is bleached; however, traces of their original meanings are retained. The study indicates that grammaticalization is a matter of degree and that case/voice markers developed from Mandarin transfer verbs display a continuum along the path of grammaticalization.

**Index Terms**—transfer verb, grammaticalization, case, voice, Mandarin Chinese

## I. INTRODUCTION

Grammaticalization can be viewed as entities undergoing process rather than static objects (Hopper & Traugott, 1993; Yin, 2004). In Mandarin Chinese, it has been noticed by a number of linguists (e.g. Li & Thompson, 1974a; Sun, 1996; Yin, 2004) that historical changes in serial verb constructions have played an important role in the process of grammaticalization in some cases. Essentially the changes “are said to be unidirectional from the major category—verb to the minor category—preposition” in the case of Mandarin Chinese along a grammaticalization continuum (Yin, 2004, p 3).

In order to define a deverbalized item, originally from a lexical verb, which undergoes grammaticalization, a new term—‘coverb’ has been created to refer to it. There have been some debates on whether a coverb should be analyzed as a real verb or preposition (e.g. Li & Thompson, 1974b; Li, 2018; Yin, 2016). Moreover, traditional analyses tend to analyze different senses of a linguistic item and the relatedness of its different senses was largely ignored. Since metaphorical extended senses or functions of a lexical item were not investigated in most traditional analyses, any motivation behind semantic and functional extensions was left unexplained (Yin, 2004).

Although some studies (e.g. Newman, 1996; Wu, 2003; Yin, 2011) have been conducted to explore the relatedness of various senses of a given item, the Chinese case/voice marker system has not been systematically explored; the relatedness of the target items and source ones in grammaticalization of case/voice markers in Mandarin Chinese should deserve more studies than it has received (Yin, 2004).

This paper will show that Mandarin typical case/voice markers (i.e. 被 *bei*—agent/passive marker, 把 *ba*—object marker, 给 *gei*—dative marker to indicate recipient or benefactive case and 拿 *na*—instrumental marker) are derived from transfer verbs. In Mandarin, 被 *bei* can perform dual functions. It can function as a typical passive voice marker or mark an agent when followed by a noun phrase. The four grammatical markers are used very frequently in Mandarin. In terms of grammaticalization, it is interesting to note that essentially Mandarin transfer verbs have developed into case/voice markers instead of other grammatical categories. This study will demonstrate that the grammaticalization of Mandarin transfer verbs as case/voice markers is not totally random, but motivated.

Langacker (1991a) observes that human beings tend to conceive of the world as being populated by discrete objects, each of which occupies a distinct location. “Some of these objects are capable of moving about and interacting with others, particularly through direct contacts” (Langacker, 1991a, p. 209). Thus, motion and dislocation of discrete objects are basic human concepts. Yin (2004, p 11) claims that “transfer verbs reflect human interactions and manipulations with the objects” and that they “can be good candidates to be used to indicate interactive relations such as affectedness between participants”. One typical example is that there are some languages (e.g. Thai, Akan) which use the verb meaning ‘take’ as an object marker.

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<sup>\*</sup> Grammatical abbreviations used in this paper are as follows: CL=Classifier, PART=particle, ASP=aspect.

Employing transfer verbs as case/voice markers is motivated by concepts of motion and transitivity as well (Yin, 2004). Motion often involves energy transfer and transitivity in which the agent (prototypically the subject) transfers energy to the theme (prototypically the object) which often changes its state as the result of energy transfer (Langacker, 1991a; Yin, 2004). Therefore, the fact that Mandarin Chinese case/voice markers typically develop from transfer verbs is hard to predict; however, “this kind of development often makes sense when it takes place” (Yin, 2004, p. 4).

II. GRAMMATICALIZATION OF TRANSFER VERBS 拿 NA 'TAKE' AND 把 BA 'TAKE, HOLD'

The semantic values of 拿 na ‘take’ and 把 ba ‘take, hold’ are somewhat similar; however, they are not identical. Their main difference lies in the different locations of focuses on an action chain.

A. Semantic Values of Verbs 拿 Na and 把 Ba

Langacker (1991a) uses the term—action chain to refer to “an interaction network which includes a series of energetic interaction thus inducing a reaction whereby it in turn transfers energy to a third, and so on indefinitely” (Langacker 1991a, p. 215). “The coverage of a finite clause is typically limited to certain facets of the interactive network it invokes” and “in a prototypical transitive clause, the profiled process constitutes an action chain that originates with a canonical agent (volitional energy source) and terminates with a canonical patient (energy sink)” (Langacker, 1991a, p. 215).

In energetic interactions, which involve an instrument in an action chain, often “three participants fall into the scope of predication of a finite clause” and the three participants instantiate the canonical agent (AG), instrument (INSTR) and patient (PAT) roles (Yin, 2004, p. 4). Typically, the agent functions as a subject and the patient acts as an object. “The subject is considered to be the head of the profiled portion of the action chain” and it lies the farthest upstream in the energy flow (Yin, 2004, p. 4). On the other hand, the object turns out to be the tail of the profiled portion in the action chain, occupying the farthest downstream in the flow (Langacker, 1991a). Figure 1 illustrates the canonical agent, instrument and patient roles.

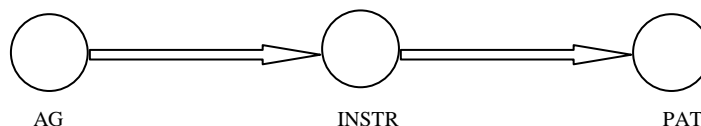


Figure 1 Schema for the Agent, Instrument and Patient Roles

Figure 1 can serve as the base for the semantic values of 拿 na. In an action chain, 拿 na indicates its initial portion or beginning of the action chain and it implies that a subsequent action contained in its base will follow the action of taking. Thus, 拿 na implies an action chain of take-and-then-do. However, the profiled part (bold in the figure) of 拿 na as an instrumental marker is its initial portion and the later stage is relatively non-salient as shown in Figure 2.

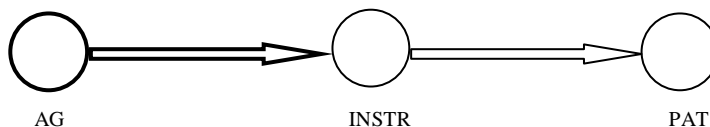


Figure 2 Schema for 拿 na Followed by an Instrument

In contrast, the situation for 把 ba is somewhat different from that of 拿 na. It focuses on the later stage of an action chain. In fact, the traditional interpretation of 把 ba as either ‘take’ or ‘hold’ is somewhat misleading and it is better to be interpreted as ‘take hold of’. Actually, it involves concepts of ‘taking and holding’ and a certain period of duration as well. The profiled portion (the bold part) is on the later stage—‘the holding part’ of the action chain as Figure 3 displays.

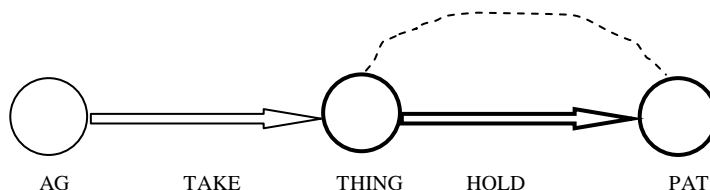


Figure 3 Schema for the Transfer Verb 把 ba

As the dashed line suggests, the thing to be taken is identical to the thing to be held in this action chain. The action chain consists of two parts: the taking part and the holding part. The second part is prominent while the first part is non-salient. Usually, the meaning of 把 *ba* involves manipulations of objects and thus, the meaning of affectedness is implied in this transfer verb. The profiled portion of 把 *ba* includes an end state of an action, that is, the completion of an action chain ‘take-and-then-hold’.

### B. Grammaticalization of 拿 *Na* ‘Take’

#### (a). Instrument Case Marker

As analyzed, 拿 *na* profiles the initial portion of the action chain. Therefore, it seems to be a good candidate to act as an instrument marker “since the case of using something often involves the situation to take the instrument first”, and thus, “the semantic values of using the instrument are compatible with the meaning of *na* which focuses on an initial portion in an action chain: ‘take-do’ (take-and-then-do)” (Yin, 2003, p. 206).

In modern Chinese, in addition to a case marker, 拿 *na* can function as a full lexical verb as (1) shows.

(1) 他从书包里拿书。

ta	congshubao	li	na	shu.
he	fromschool bag	inside	take	book

‘He took books from the school bag.’

However, the sentence in (2) displays the ambiguity of its lexical use and grammatical use.

(2) 我拿筷子吃饭。

wo	na	kuaizi	chifan.
I	take	chopstick	eat

a. ‘I took chopsticks and (then) ate.’  
b. ‘I ate with chopsticks.’

Li and Thompson (1974a, 1976, 1981) claim that the changes in serial verb constructions play a role in the process of Mandarin Chinese grammaticalization, which involves reanalysis. In a serial verb construction reading, the sentence in (2) contains two clauses while in an instrumental reading of 拿 *na*, the sentence is reanalyzed to contain one clause with the deverbalized 拿 *na* functioning as an instrumental marker.

When a sentence is employed to express contrast or describe a habitual situation, the preferred reading for 拿 *na* would be an instrumental reading rather than a serial verb construction reading:

(3) a. 你拿筷子吃饭还是拿调羹吃饭？

ni	na	kuaizi	chifan	haishi	na	tiaogeng	chifan?
you	take	chopstick	eat	or	take	spoon	eat

‘Do you eat with chopsticks or with a spoon?’

b. 你经常拿筷子吃饭吗？

ni	jingchang	na	kuaizi	chifan	ma?
you	often	take	chopstick	eat	PART

‘Do you often eat with chopsticks?’

In the two sentences in (3), 拿 *na* mainly suggests the means to do something rather than the action of taking. If it is a habitual action indicated by the adverbial word of frequency 经常 *jingchang* ‘often’, 拿 *na*’s instrumental flavor even becomes stronger.

If the phrase following 拿 *na* is not a concrete entity, but an abstract thing as (4) shows, it is typical for 拿 *na* to have an instrumental marker reading since the *na*’s verbal flavor is reduced significantly by the abstract entities following 拿 *na*.

(4) 我们应该拿新思想看待世界。

women	yinggai	na	xin sixiang	kandai	shijie.
we	should	take	new thoughts	look at	world

‘We should look at the world with new thoughts.’

In fact, the use of 拿 *na* forms a continuum, with the prototypical serial verb use at one end and the typical instrumental marker use at the other end (Yin, 2003, p. 207). Examples from (1) to (4) display this kind of continuum. Usually the noun following the instrumental 拿 *na* is insentient since it is typical to have an inanimate object to act as an instrument.

#### (b). Topic Marker

As a grammatical marker, 拿 *na* can also function as a topic marker. The meaning of 拿 *na* ‘take’ implies the concept of contact. “When the transfer verb is used metaphorically to indicate mental contact, the energy transferred is in the

abstract domain, i.e., from human mind to the thing to be contacted. The topic marker comes into being when na ‘take’ indicates mental contact and the thing to be taken and picked up serves as a reference point” (Yin, 2003, p. 207).

Langacker (1993, 2013) claims that human cognitive capacity to invoke the conception of one thing as a reference point is for establishing mental contact with another. The mental path to trace the target through a reference point is illustrated in Figure 4.

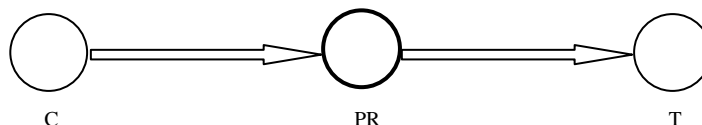


Figure 4 The Mental Path to Trace the Target Through RP

The circle labeled C stands for the conceptualizer and RP represents the reference point. T represents the target—the entity with which the conceptualizer uses the reference point to establish mental contact (Langacker, 1999). The arrows stand for the mental path the conceptualizer follows to trace the target (Langacker, 1999). When 拿 na functions as a reference point, the mental path can be metaphorically viewed as an action or energy transfer chain in the mental domain. In that case, 拿 na profiles the initial stage of the chain and leaves the second half of the chain non-salient as shown in Figure 5.

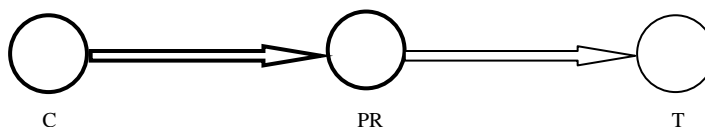


Figure 5 Schema for 拿 na Used as a Reference Point

- (5) 拿张三来说，他的舞跳得很好，但学习不好。  
 na Zhangsan lai shuo, tade wu tiao  
 take Zhangsan come speak his dance dance (verb)  
 de hen hao, dan xuexi bu hao.  
 PART (degree) very good but study not good  
 ‘As far as Zhangsan is concerned, his dance is very good, but his studies are not good.’

- (6) 拿水果而言，我最喜欢苹果。  
 na shuiguo er yian, wo zui xihuan pingguo.  
 take fruit PART talk I most like apple  
 ‘Talking about fruits, I like apples best.’

(Yin, 2003, p. 207)

In (5), 张三 Zhangsan is used as a reference point to trace the things associated with him: his dance and his studies while in (6), fruits serve as a reference point to reach the target of apples. Therefore, 拿 na in these two sentences serve as a topic marker and this kind of use is the metaphorical extension of this transfer verb when the concrete spatial domain is shifted to an abstract domain to indicate mental contact.

(c). Grammaticalization of 把 Ba ‘Take and Hold (Take Hold of)’

Maybe in Old Chinese the transfer verb 把 ba would be better to be interpreted as ‘take hold of’, implying certain duration of an activity and the profiled part of this verb is on the later stage—‘the holding portion’ (Yin, 2003) as Figure 3 shows. The meaning of this transfer verb includes the concept of manipulations of objects and implies completed affectedness. In the process of grammaticalization of 把 ba as an object marker, the semantics of 把 ba is bleached; however, traces of the meaning of 把 ba as a lexical verb can be observed and the use of 把 ba as a case marker can be regarded as the functional extension of this verb (Yin, 2003). In the case of 把 ba as an object marker, basically, the meaning of affectedness motivates its extension.

The semantic or functional extension of a linguistic expression from its existing meaning to a new one will usually be motivated by a relation that language users perceive between the existing and the new designata (Lichtenberk, 1991; Yin, 2002). Lakoff (1987) claims that semantic and functional extensions are not completely arbitrary. If a semantic extension happens, it usually makes sense (Lakoff, 1987; Yin, 2002). The meaning of 把 ba implies manipulations and affectedness of the objects being held. In the case of 把 ba as an object marker, basically, the meaning of affectedness motivates its extension.

1. Emergence of 把 Ba as an Object Marker

In Old Chinese before the Tang dynasty, 把 *ba* was a lexical verb meaning ‘take hold of’ and it was used in a single predicate sentence (Yin, 2004) as in (7):

- (7) 左手把其袖  
 zuo shou ba qi xiu  
 left hand hold his sleeve  
 ‘The left-hand holds his sleeve.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 61)

In Middle Chinese, 把 *ba* became increasingly associated with a serial-verb construction (Sun 1996) as the examples in (8) and (9) show.

- (8) 诗句无人识应把剑看  
 shi ju wu ren shi yin ba jian kan.  
 poem sentence no man appreciate should hold sword see  
 ‘Since no one appreciates poetry, I should take hold of the sword to contemplate it.’  
 (Lord, 1993, p. 115)

- (9) 醉把花看益自伤  
 zui ba hua kan yi zi shang  
 drunk hold flower watch more self hurt  
 ‘Drunk, I look at the flower by holding it, even more broken-hearted.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 62)

In (8) and (9), 把 *ba* is used as a transfer verb to mean ‘take hold of’; it is used as the first verb in a serial verb construction (Yin, 2004).

In the seventh to ninth century, the lexical item 把 *ba* assumed an ambiguous status between a verb and prepositional object case marker and the example in (10) suggests two possible interpretations (Yin, 2004):

- (10) 醉把竹根子细看  
 zui ba zhu-gen-zi xi kan  
 drunk BA dogwood-tree careful look  
 a. ‘While drunk, (I) took hold of the dogwood and carefully looked at it.’  
 b. ‘While drunk, (I) carefully looked at the dogwood.’

(Li & Thompson, 1976, p. 485)

The example in (10) provides the staging for a reanalysis of the transfer verb 把 *ba* ‘take hold of’ as an object case marker and the collapsing of what had once a serial verb construction which contains two clauses (interpretation 10a) into a single clause (interpretation 10b) (Hopper & Traugott, 1993; Yin, 2004).

The process of grammaticalization of 把 *ba* as an object case marker began in the late Tang dynasty (around 9th c. AD) (Li & Thompson, 1974a; Yin, 2004). Example (11) from the Tang dynasty illustrates the use of 把 *ba* as an object case marker:

- (11) 莫把杭州刺史欺  
 mo ba Hangzhou cishi qi  
 not BA Hangzhou magistrate deceive  
 ‘Do not deceive the magistrate of Hangzhou.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 62)

## 2. Semantic Constraints of the 把 *Ba*-Construction

In Middle Chinese, 把 *ba* went through a process of semantic abstraction, which bleached some of its concrete verbal meanings and became an object marker (Sun, 1996); however, some components or traces of the original verb meanings are still at work in this construction. In modern Chinese, although the 把 *ba* construction is used extensively, there are semantic constraints on the use of the 把 *ba* construction and these constraints such as total affectedness, temporal boundedness, and definiteness reflect the traces of 把 *ba*’s original verb meaning.

### (1). Total Affectedness

The 把 *ba* construction has been considered a highly transitive type of clause (Hopper & Thompson, 1980). This is because this verb’s core meaning of total affectedness is extended to the 把 *ba* construction in modern Mandarin Chinese since the verb meaning of 把 *ba* indicates manipulations and affectedness of an object and it implies the completion of an action chain as well. It was first observed by Tai (1984) that the 把 *ba* construction suggests the completion of an event.

The two sentences in (12) strongly suggest that the basic function of the 把 *ba* construction is to indicate the completion of an action or the complete affectedness of the object, which immediately follows 把 *ba* (Sun, 1996).

- (12) a. \*他把苹果吃了，但是没吃完。  
 \*ta ba pingguo chi le, danshi mei chi wan.

- he BA apple eat ASP, but not eat finish.  
 b. 他吃了苹果, 但是没吃完。  
 ta chi le pingguo, danshi mei chi wan.  
 he eat ASP apple but not eat finish  
 'He has eaten the apple, but did not eat it up.'

In (12b) without the 把 ba construction, there is no implication of eating up the apple even though the temporal structure in this sentence is bounded indicated by the aspect particle le. However, with the 把 ba construction, the presupposition of the sentence is different. It implies the total affectedness of the event of eating up the apple. The suggestion of the unfinished apple in the second clause of (12a) contradicts such a presupposition and as a result the sentence in (12a) is unacceptable.

### (2). Temporal Boundedness

The verb meaning of 把 ba implies a complete action chain as Figure 3 indicates, and thus, it involves a starting point and an ending point to specify a conceptual boundary of an event. Its verb meaning of temporal boundedness is retained in the 把 ba construction.

- (13) a. \*你把头抬  
 \*ni ba tou tai  
 you BA head raise  
 b. 你把头抬一下。  
 ni ba tou tai yi xia.  
 you BA head raise once CL  
 'I raised (my) head once.'
- (14) a. \*我已经把书看  
 \*wo yijing ba shu kan  
 I already BA book read  
 b. 我已经把书看完。  
 wo yijing ba shu kan wan.  
 I already BA book read finish  
 'I've already finished reading the book.'

The temporal structure of the 把 ba construction should be bounded. (13a) and (14a) do not sound good exactly because of the temporal uncertainty. With the numeral-classifier construction 一下 yi xia 'once' in (13b), the event is then temporally bounded and there must be a beginning point and an ending point in the event of raising one's head once (Sun, 1996). In the case of (14b), the complement 完 wan 'finish' with the sense of completion provides a temporal boundary to the event (Ji, 1997).

### (3). Definiteness

If somebody takes hold of an object, the object should be definite. Moreover, if something is totally affected, which is implied by the original verb 把 ba, the thing should be specific, not a generic term or indefinite referent. In the case of 把 ba functioning as an object marker, the semantic constraint of definiteness from the original verb meaning 把 ba is transferred to the 把 ba construction.

- (15) 他把苹果吃了。  
 ta ba pingguo chi le.  
 he BA apple eat ASP  
 'He ate the apple.'  
 \*'He ate an apple.'

(Sun, 1996, p. 53)

In Mandarin Chinese, a bare nominal like pingguo 'apple' in (15) can be either definite or indefinite depending on contexts; however, the indefinite reading of the bare nominal after 把 ba is not possible due to one of the basic functions of 把 ba, which indicates total affectedness of an entity. If the existence of the entity marked in the 把 ba construction is not presupposed in the discourse or contexts, there would be no reason for us to "speak of the complete affectedness of something that is nonexistent. Maybe this is why the NP marked by 把 ba cannot be nonspecific" (Sun, 1996, p. 58).

## III. GRAMMATICALIZATION OF TRANSFER VERBS 被 BEI 'RECEIVE' AND 给 GEI 'GIVE'

Prior to the discussion of the grammaticalization of transfer verbs 被 bei 'receive' and 给 gei 'give' in this section, it will be helpful to analyze semantic values of these two verbs.

### A. Semantic Values of Verbs 给 Gei and 被 Bei

给 *gei* ‘give’ and 被 *bei* ‘receive’ (used as a verb in Old Chinese) from which the 被 *bei* passive construction is derived, have the same base, involving three participants: the giver, the thing, the receiver (Yin, 2004). ‘Give’ involves an energy flow of an action chain, which is initiated by the benevolent giver who is the energy source and ends up with the recipient who is the energy sink while ‘receive’ focuses more on the later stage of this transfer and the receiver acts as the main participant (Langacker, 1991a; Yin, 2004). The three participants involved in the two verbs are AGENT, RECEIVER and MOVER. The receiver is the final possessor and the experiencer to perceive the change of possession (Yin, 2004). In ‘give’, the agent is selected as the subject; however, in ‘receive’, the receiver is chosen as the subject. In both, the mover acts as the object (Yin, 2004).

The semantic contrast of the two verbs lies less in conceptual content than in grammatical relations (Langacker, 1991a; Yin, 2004). For the verb ‘give’, the subject is an agent while for the verb ‘receive’ the subject is the receiver (Yin, 2004). Langacker (1991b) observes that the receiver represents a highly marked choice of subject since its role is passive, that is, the giver is agentive but the receiver does not necessarily do anything at all; hence, in giving and receiving, the giver essentially is in control and the receiver plays a relatively passive role in the act of transfer (Yin, 2004). In non-spatial domains or in non-direct transfer acts such as 送 *song* ‘send’, 寄 *ji* ‘post’ the passive meaning of receiving is even more prominent. For example, in the sentence: ‘I received an invitation, but I didn’t accept it’, the subject received something passively but declined it actively. Yin (2004) claims that the implication of the passive role from the semantics of the original verb 被 *bei* ‘receive’ motivates the extension of the 被 *bei* passive construction.

### B. Grammaticalization of 被 *Bei* ‘Receive’

In Old Chinese, 被 *bei* was originally a verb, meaning ‘receive’ and the example in (16) illustrates its verbal usage.

- (16) 被水寒之害  
 bei shui han zhi hai  
 receive water cold of damage  
 ‘Receive damage from flood and cold.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 63)

One possible explanation for the emergence of 被 *bei* as a passive marker was a consequence of a word-order neutralization associated with two types of verbs formally distinguished between actor and undergoer subjects (Yin, 2004). For some verbs in Old Chinese, there were word-order constraints on the subject positions (Mei, 1991; Sun, 1996). Certain verbs allowed only actor subjects while some others allowed only undergoer subjects (Yin, 2004).

- (17) 岸崩尽压杀卧着者  
 an beng jin ya-sha wozhe  
 bank break all press-kill sleepers  
 ‘The bank gave away, killing all the sleeping people.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 64)

- (18) 百余人炭崩尽压死  
 bai yu ren tan beng jin ya-si  
 hundred more people mine break all press-die  
 ‘More than one hundred people were killed in the collapse of the mine.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 64)

In (17), the serial verb *ya-sha* ‘press-kill’ as V-sha type in Old Chinese requires an actor as its subject while in (18), the serial verb *ya-si* ‘press-die’ as a V-si type requires an undergoer as its subject (Yin, 2004).

In Middle Chinese such a distinction was neutralized (Sun, 1996). The example in (19) shows that an actor subject appears before a V-si type verb, which was not allowed in Old Chinese (Sun, 1996; Yin, 2004):

- (19) 主人欲打死之  
 zhuren yu da-si zhi  
 master want hit-die him  
 ‘The master wants to kill him.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 64)

Mei (1991) noticed that the neutralization process started in the Han period (206 BC-220 AD) and stabilized in the Tang period. The process of neutralization could lead to possible ambiguity in communication since the subject for the V-si could be either the person who was the actor or the person who was the patient affected by the action. “The grammaticalization of 被 *bei* right at this time functioned to mark the passive construction. In a way, it functioned to alleviate a potential communicative problem by indicating that the subject was not an actor” (Sun, 1996, p. 65).

- (20) 独坐堂上夜被刺死  
 du zuo tang shang, ye bei ci-si  
 alone sit hall up night BEI stab-die  
 ‘Sitting alone in the hall, (he) was stabbed to death at night.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 65)

In (20), the potential subject, which happened to be a zero anaphora, of a V-si type serial verb, was indicated to be a non-agent by the passive marker 被 *bei* (Sun, 1996).

There is some evidence to suggest that the neutralization process and the development of the 被 *bei* as a passive construction marker started almost at the same time (Li & Thompson 1974a; Yin, 2004). In the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) when the neutralization started to emerge, 被 *bei* began to act as a grammatical marker and at that stage the 被 *bei* passive construction did not have an agent (Li & Thompson 1974a) as (21) shows:

- (21) 忠而被谤  
 zhong er bei bang  
 loyal yet BEI villify  
 ‘Loyal and yet was villified.’

(Li & Thompson, 1974a, p. 203)

At an early process of grammaticalization, 被 *bei* seems to indicate that the nominal before 被 *bei* is not an actor to solve the potential ambiguity. Then in the Tang Dynasty 被 *bei* began to emerge as a grammatical component to introduce an actor in addition to its function as a passive marker (Wang, 1958), as (22) indicates.

- (22) 常被老元偷格律  
 chang bei lao Yuan tou ge-lv  
 often pass old Yuan steal rhyme-scheme  
 ‘(My) prosodic scheme was frequently stolen by Old Yuan.’

(Sun, 1996, p. 64)

In (22), a verb reading of 被 *bei*, meaning ‘receive’ is not available and instead, 被 *bei* acts as a passive marker and also indicates that the nominal immediately follows 被 *bei* assumes an actor role (Yin, 2004).

The 被 *bei* passive construction emerged relatively early and it has gone through one intermediate stage to simply function as a passive marker without marking an agent before developing into its present stage to introduce an actor as well (Li & Thompson, 1974a; Yin, 2004).

### C. Grammaticalization of 给 *Gei* ‘Give’

Newman (1993) suggests that different meanings related to 给 *gei* ‘give’ are unpredictable, but motivated and that the typical case of 给 *gei* ‘give’ is that someone who has something passes it with his/her hands to another one. As Figure 6 shows, the focus of ‘give’ is on the initial part of the action chain; nevertheless, the complicated connections between the receiver and the thing being moved is included in the base as well (Langacker, 1991a; Yin, 2004). ‘In most cases, the semantic extension brings into focus some facet of the basic human experience of giving something to someone’ (Newman, 1993, p. 479). There are various ways to extract subparts of the literal meaning of ‘give’ or to extend the metaphorical meaning to other semantic fields (Fagerli, 2001). For instance, in the case of 给 *gei* ‘give’ in Mandarin Chinese, the mover could be extended to denote abstract entities (Yin, 2004). Thus, when 给 *gei* is used as a lexical verb, the mover can be a concrete object as in (23) or an abstract entity as in (24).

- (23) 我给了他一台电脑。  
 wo gei le ta yi tai diannaoh.  
 I give ASP him one CL 电脑.  
 ‘I gave him a computer.’
- (24) 老师给了我一个好主意。  
 laoshi gei le wo yi ge hao zhuyi.  
 Teacher give ASP me one CL good idea  
 ‘The teacher gave me a good idea.’

(Yin, 2004, p. 9)

In addition to functioning as a verb, 给 *gei* can act as a recipient marker. The recipient marker 给 *gei* ‘invokes a scene in which some transfer takes place’ (Newman, 1996, p. 212). It can be used to ‘plot the path of an object sent by an agent’ to a recipient and it ‘has the same base as GIVE-type predicates which includes a GIVER, a THING, and a RECIPIENT’ (Newman, 1993, p. 446). The recipient marker 给 *gei* can often be used with many GIVE-type predicates such as 送 *song* ‘send’, 寄 *ji* ‘mail’, 交 *jiao* ‘hand in’, 还 *huan* ‘give back’, 买 *mai* ‘buy’.

- (25) 他寄了一封信给我。  
 ta ji le yi feng xin gei wo  
 he mail ASP one CL letter to me  
 ‘He mailed a letter to me.’
- (26) 我交了作业给他。  
 wo jiao le zuoye gei ta  
 I hand in ASP assignment to him  
 ‘I handed in the assignment to him.’



Benefactive marker is another grammatical role for 给 *gei* to perform. There are some connections between the recipient and the benefactive use since benefactive use is for the sake of or to the benefit of somebody and is to the recipient advantage (Yin, 2003). “The scenario whereby giving something results in some kind of benefit to the recipient is a natural and frequent occurrence in human experience” (Newman, 1993, p. 459). When 给 *gei* functions as a benefactive marker, it usually occurs before a main verb.

- (27) 他给儿子开了个银行账户。  
 ta gei erzi kai le ge yinhang zhanghu.  
 he for son open ASP CL bankaccount  
 ‘He opened a bank account for his son.’
- (28) 我给他寄了一封信。  
 wo gei ta ji le yi feng xin.  
 I for him/her mail ASP one CL letter.  
 ‘I mailed a letter for him.’

(Li & Thompson, 1981, p. 388)

However, when 给 *gei* occurs before a main verb as a grammatical marker, it is not necessarily a benefactive marker. With some verbs, both the recipient interpretation and benefactive interpretation are equally possible as in (29).

- (29) 我给他写了一封信。  
 wo gei ta xie le yi feng xin.  
 I for/to him write ASP one CL letter.  
 ‘I wrote a letter for him.’ or ‘I wrote a letter to him’.

(Li & Thompson, 1981, p. 387)

Which kind of interpretation will survive mainly depends on contexts. In (29), if the letter was written and then posted to him, 给 *gei* should be interpreted as a recipient marker. However, in (29) if 他 *ta* ‘he’ asked me to write a letter and then he would send it to someone else, the recipient interpretation would be no longer available.

Mandarin Chinese is not the only language to use a verb which means ‘give’ as the dative marker. In a number of languages (e.g. Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Akan, Hokkien, Yoruba, Ewe, Sranan) a verb meaning ‘give’ can be used to mark the recipient or the benefactive or both.

- (30) a. mi wroko gi en.  
 I worked give him.  
 ‘I worked for him.’
- b. chan song nans hai dek.  
 I sent book give child  
 ‘I sent a book to a child.’ / ‘I sent a book for the child.’

(Fagerli, 2001, p. 211)

(Newman, 1996, p. 213)

In (30a), the verb *gi* ‘give’ in Sranan marks the benefactive marker and in (30b) *hai* ‘give’ in Thai functions as a recipient or benefactive marker.

#### IV. GRAMMATICALIZATION: A MATTER OF DEGREE

Grammaticalization is the process whereby lexical items can come in certain contexts to perform grammatical functions and it can be viewed from the diachronic perspective (Hopper & Traugott, 1993). As discussed in the previous sections, typical case/voice markers have developed from transfer verbs in Mandarin Chinese. The development is said to be unidirectional from the major category—verb to the minor category—preposition (or coverb as defined by some linguists) along a grammaticalization continuum. However, the rate of changes from transfer verbs to case/voice markers is not uniform and some members in this category are still in the ongoing process of grammaticalization.

Yin (2004) claims that the passive/agent marker 被 *bei* developed from a lexical verb meaning ‘receive’ to a full-fledged case marker and that it underwent an intermediate stage to mark a passive construction only without introducing an agent. However, in modern Mandarin Chinese, the verb reading for 被 *bei* ‘receive’ is not available any longer; however, the passive implication from this verb is still carried over to the 被 *bei* construction (Yin, 2004).

In Mandarin Chinese, 把 *ba* is basically used as an object marker though it retains some traces of its original verb meaning such as total affectedness, temporal boundedness and definitiveness. In modern Mandarin when it is used as a verb, it cannot occur alone except in some idioms. In (31), 把 *ba* is used as a verb; however, it occurs together with another verb 握 *wo* ‘grasp’ to form a compound verb.

- (31) 我们必须把握这个机会。  
 women bixi ba-wo zhe ge hao jihui.  
 we should hold-grasp this CL good opportunity  
 ‘We should grasp this good opportunity.’

The original transfer verb 把 ba ‘take hold of’ has quite developed into a case marker. However, it has not developed as a full-fledged case marker as 被 bei and the process is still going on. It originally marked a concrete thing as an object of a verb; however, it has started to mark a non-concrete entity as an object in recent years as in (32).

- (32) 我朋友把秘密说出来了。  
 wo pengyou ba mimi shuo chulai le.  
 my friend BA secret speak out ASP  
 ‘My friend spoke out his secret.’

Using a transfer verb like 把 ba ‘take’ as an object marker may not be total random. In some West African languages such as Akan, Ga, Twi, the verb which means ‘take’ is also used to mark an object (Lord, 1982).

The other two transfer verbs are not as well developed as 被 bei and 把 ba to function as case markers. The transfer verb 给 gei ‘give’ can be used either as a lexical verb or case marker to perform multiple functions in modern Mandarin Chinese (Yin, 2004). 给 gei ‘give’ manifests its verb status when it serves as a main predicate. When used with another verb in a clause, it often functions as a case marker. However, even if it performs a grammatical function, it can still signal its verb flavor.

- (33) 你给不给我买书?  
 ni gei bu gei wo mai shu?  
 you give not give me buy book  
 ‘Do you buy a book for me?’

- (34) 他给了我买了一本书。  
 \*ta gei le wo mai le yi ben shu .  
 he give ASP me buy ASP one CL book

In Mandarin Chinese, verbs can enter into V(erb)-not-V(erb) constructions to form questions and it can also take ‘aspect’ particles such as 了 le ‘perfective’, 着 zhe ‘progressive’. In the case of 给 gei as a case marker, it is able to enter into the V-not-V construction; nevertheless, it cannot take an aspectual marker such as 了 le ‘perfective’ as a normal lexical verb does.

Another transfer verb 拿 na ‘take’ can function as an instrument marker. However, it is still in the process of grammaticalization. 拿 Na can be used either as a full lexical verb or as an instrumental marker in modern Mandarin. When it is used to mark an instrument marker, it still shares some properties with its regular verb.

- (35) 你拿不拿筷子吃饭?  
 ni na bu na kuaizi chifan?  
 you take not take chopsticks eat  
 ‘Do you eat with chopsticks?’

- (36) 他拿了筷子吃饭。  
 ta na le kuaizi chifan.  
 he take ASP chopsticks eat  
 ‘He ate with chopsticks.’

As (35) and (36) show, 拿 na can enter into V-not-V constructions, and moreover, it is able to take an aspectual particle like the perfective aspect marker le. In the case of the transfer verb 拿 na to serve as a case marker, its verb flavor is the strongest among the four transfer verbs, which function as grammatical markers.

Therefore, the grammaticalization of Mandarin transfer verbs as case/voice markers is a matter of degree. Figure 6 displays a continuum along the path of the development of grammaticalization with 拿 na as being the least grammatical and with 被 bei as being the most grammatical among the four transfer verbs functioning as grammatical markers.

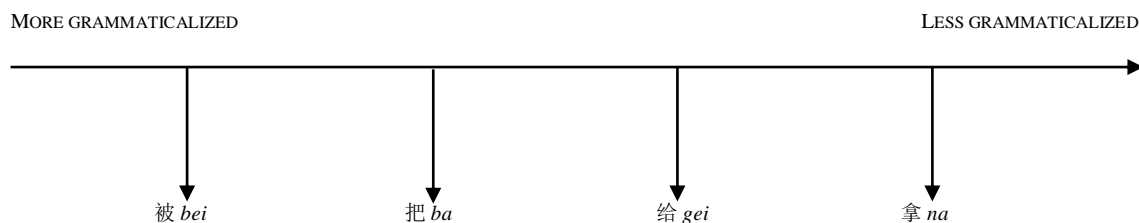


Figure 6 Continuum of Grammaticalization

V. CONCLUSIONS

It has been shown in this paper that typical case/voice markers in Mandarin Chinese have developed from transfer verbs. “Transfer verbs usually involve an energy flow along an action chain” (Yin, 2004, p.11). As illustrated, originally

拿 *na* and 给 *gei* focus more on the initial portion of the energy flow while 把 *ba* and 被 *bei* focus more on the later portion of the flow. When 给 *gei* functions as a lexical verb, its subject can be the energy source; however, when it marks a dative case, the recipient or the benefactive can be viewed as the energy sink. In the case of 被 *bei*, at the earlier stage 被 *bei* only marked the passive subject or the passive construction. Later it developed to mark the agent as well, and the agent, of course, is in the source domain of the energy flow of an action chain. According to two binary parameters, the systematic relationships of case/voice markers are illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1  
SYSTEMATIC RELATIONSHIPS OF CASE/VOICE MARKERS

	Source domain	Target (recipient) domain
Active (sentient)	AGENT (Passive) 被 <i>bei</i>	DATIVE (recipient/benefactive) 给 <i>gei</i>
Passive (non-sentient)	INSTRUMENT 拿 <i>na</i> NP [inanimate]	PATIENT (object/theme) 把 <i>ba</i>

The distinction between the source domain and the target (recipient) domain is based on energy transmission. Agents and instruments transfer energy to downstream participants and the other roles in this energy transfer are generally recipients. A further distinction is made in each domain between active and passive participants. The agent and the recipient/benefactive are grouped as active participants mainly on the basis of their necessary sentience. On the other hand, the instrument is usually inanimate and the patient or the theme is generally the passively affected entity and often serves as a direct object (Langacker, 1991a).

The grammaticalization of Mandarin transfer verbs as case/voice markers is not totally random, though unpredictable, but motivated. Transfer verbs often reflect human interactions and manipulations with physical objects. In this sense, transfer verbs can be good candidates to be employed to indicate interactive relations such as affectedness between participants (Yin, 2004). The development of case/voice markers can be analyzed as semantic/functional extensions. It has been demonstrated in this paper that there is certain relatedness between the original lexical verb and the grammatical marker. In some cases, the changes in serial verb constructions play a role in the process of Mandarin Chinese grammaticalization, which involves reanalysis. Former verbs in serial verb constructions were reanalyzed as case/voice markers, and thus, two clauses were collapsed into one clause. In the process of grammaticalization, usually the semantics of the lexical item is bleached; however, traces of its original meanings are retained in many cases. In some cases, the changes from transfer verbs to case markers do not stop at present and they are still in the ongoing process. The grammaticalization of Mandarin transfer verbs as case/voice markers is a matter of degree. They display a continuum along the path of the development of grammaticalization with 拿 *na* as being the least grammatical and with 被 *bei* as being the most grammatical.

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