

# LINKING AGENTIVE OBJECTS IN MANDARIN CHINESE

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This paper aims to examine the nature of the agent object constructions in Mandarin Chinese within a linking theory as part of UG. Linking, or mapping, refers to the syntactic assignment of thematic roles. For example, agents are typically assigned to subject and patient to object. Linking is thus part of the syntax-semantics interface and is an important part of the universal grammar. The crucial issue is to constrain the linking possibilities within the realm of natural languages. Among the fundamental principles, there are the  $\theta$ -criterion (Chomsky 1981), the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH) (Baker 1988), and the Relativized UTAH (Larson 1988).

In this paper, the lexical mapping theory (LMT) (Bresnan and Kanerva 1989, Bresnan and Zaenen 1990, Her 1999), a subtheory within the Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) (Bresnan 2001), is adopted. The single unified mapping principle in LMT, as shown in (1), has integrated the three principles listed above and is effective in accounting for unaccusativity; however, it is problematic with agentive objects, which do seem to occur in a number of Mandarin constructions. The suspicious agentive objects in Mandarin include the constructions illustrated in (2).

(1) Unified Mapping Principle (Her 1999, 2003, to appear):

In a descending order, map each role onto the most prominent function that is compatible\* and available<sup>+</sup>.

(\*A function is compatible if it contains no conflicting feature.

<sup>+</sup>A function is available if it is not linked to a role.)

- (2) a. 一磅肉吃兩個人。 <ag-OBJ pt-SUBJ>  
Yi bang rou chi liang ge ren.  
one pound meat eat two CL person  
'One pound of meat feeds two people.'
- b. 一輛計程車坐四個人。 <ag-OBJ pt-SUBJ>  
Yi liang jichengche zuo si ge ren.  
one CL taxi sit four CL person  
'One taxi sits four people.'
- c. 這種藥會吃死你。 <ag-OBJ pt-SUBJ>  
Zhe zhong yao hui chi-si ni.  
this kind drug will eat-die you  
'Eating this kind of drugs will kill you.'
- d. 這塊木頭鋸斷了三把鋸子。 <inst-OBJ pt-SUBJ>  
Zhe kuai mutou ju-duan le san ba juzi  
this piece wood saw-break ASP three CL saw  
'Sawing this piece of wood has caused three saws to break.'

There are a number of issues to be explored. First of all, a generalization is needed to define the class of verbs in (2a-b) and their lexical semantic change from the canonical construction to the inverted construction. The issue of causativity needs to be explored. As seen in the resultative compounds in (2c-d), the subject is the cause in a strongly causative construction. However, the fact that causativity is not a feature in other agentive object constructions cast doubt on extending Y. Li's (1995, 1999) causativity account.

The extensive discussions of inverted constructions in Ren (1999, 2001, 2005) will be closely examined and the analysis deliberated. We will also consider the claim made by A. Li (1998, 1999) that indefinite nominals of quantity concern not individuals and in fact denote quantity only. The suppression account offered in Her (2004, to appear), where a composing role is suppressed to allow the composite role, bound by two composing roles, be properly syntactically assigned, will also be explored for its plausibility for other non-patient objects. We will also need to explore whether the inverted agent role in fact retains any trace of agenthood. The final analysis derived will be rendered in the formal framework of LFG.

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