

# The Syntax of Gei(give)-VP Construction in Mandarin Chinese

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# Gei (give) as a versatile element in Mandarin

## Double object construction

- (1) Zhangsan **gei** le wo yi ben shu  
John **give** Asp 1st-SG one CL book  
'John gave me a book.'

## Prepositional dative construction

- (2) Zhangsan jie le yixie qian **gei** wo  
John lend Asp some money **to** 1st-SG  
'John lent some money to me.'

## Introducing beneficiary

- (3) Zhangsan **gei** wo dao le bei shui  
John **for** 1st-SG pour Asp CL water  
'John poured a cup of water for me.'

## Introducing affectee

- (4) Zhangsan **gei** wo kao le ling fen  
John **on** 1st-SG score Asp zero mark  
'John got zero mark in exam on me!'

## Gei-VP construction (Shen & Sybesma 2001)

- In previous examples, there is one thing in common: **gei** introduces new argument into the structure, whether it is indirect object, beneficiary or affectee.
- However, there is another special construction '**gei-VP**', where **gei** is followed by VP. **Gei** does not seem to introduce any nominal argument and **gei-VP** can express passive meaning, as shown below.

(5) huaping **gei** da-po le  
vase **gei** hit-broken Asp  
'The vase was hit broken.'

(6) \*huaping **ziji** gei da-po le  
vase **self** gei hit-broken Asp  
'The vase was hit-broken by itself.'

## More properties on gei-VP

■ Gei-VP is incompatible with an overt external argument. Also, when gei-VP is present, objects often have to move away from its base position.

(7) Zhangsan da-po le huaping (active sentence)

John hit-broke Asp vase

'John hit the vase and the vase was broken.'

(8) \*Zhangsan **gei** da-po le huaping

John **gei** hit-broke Asp vase

'John hit the vase and the vase was broken.'

## Gei-VP in passives and causatives

■ More interestingly, **gei-VP** can also occur in the lower structure of 'bei' passives and 'ba' causatives.

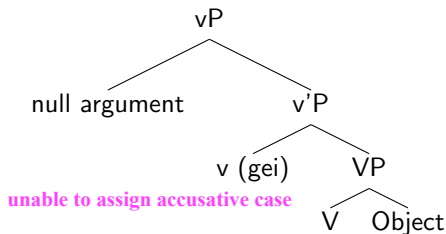
(9) huaping **bei** Zhangsan **(gei) da-po** le  
vase **bei** John **(gei) hit-broken** Asp  
'The vase was hit broken by John.'

(10) Zhangsan **ba** huaping **(gei) da-po** le  
John **ba** vase **(gei) hit-broken** Asp  
'John caused the vase to be broken by hitting it.'

■ Research questions: 1. What is the syntax of **gei-VP** 2. Is the syntax the same when **gei** is present and absent in (7)?

# The syntax of *gei*-VP

- I argue that *gei* is merged in little *v* and introduces a null argument in the external argument position. In the meantime, this little *v* does not have the ability to assign accusative case.



# Availability of functional items and structure building

- I also propose that the syntactic structures of bei passives with *gei* and without *gei* are different. When *gei* is present, *bei*-NP forms a PP. When *gei* is absent, *bei* selects an unsaturated IP as its complement (following Huang 1999).
- This study is closely related to the debate on whether the external argument is merged in the same position as in active sentences or is merged as adjunct PPs. Instead of being contradictory, they are two mechanisms available in languages. Which mechanism the language takes depends on the functional morpheme inventory the language has and the availability of null argument.

# In the rest of the talk, we will cover

- 1 Background intro on the syntax of bei (passives) and ba (causatives)
- 2 Two distinct structures with gei and without gei
- 3 Short passives bei-VP vs gei-VP
- 4 Optionality of gei
- 5 Conclusion



## Background intro on the syntax of bei (passives) and ba (causatives)

# Bei passives (Huang 1999, Liu & Huang 2016)

## Active sentences

- (11) Zhangsan da-po le huaping  
 John hit-broken Asp vase  
 'John hit the vase and the vase broke.'
- (12) pingshenren shuo-ku le tougaoren  
 reviewer criticize-cry Asp author  
 'The reviewer criticized the author and the author ended up crying.'

## Long passives

- (13) tougaoren bei pingshenren shuo-ku le  
 author bei reviewer criticize-cry Asp  
 'The author was criticized to tears by the reviewer.'

## Short passives

- (14) tougaoren bei shuo-ku le  
 author bei criticize-cry Asp  
 'The author was criticized to tears.'

# Ba causatives

## Active sentences

- (15) Zhangsan da-po le huaping  
 John hit-broken Asp vase  
 'John hit the vase and the vase was broken.'

## ba causatives

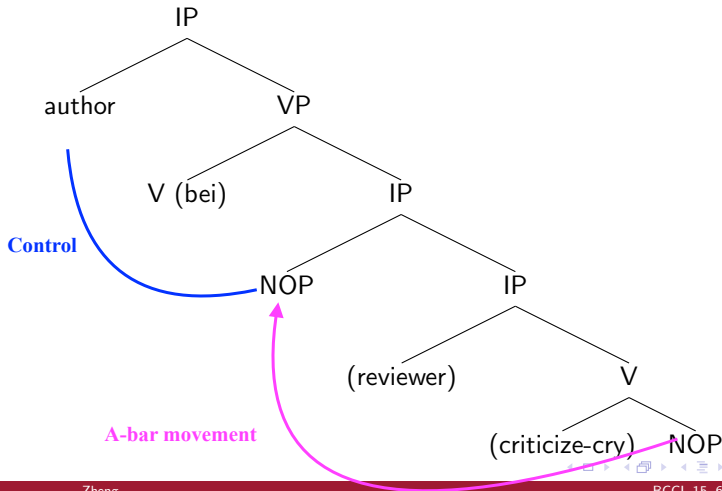
- (16) Zhangsan **ba** huaping da-po le  
 John **ba** vase hit-broken Asp  
 'John caused the vase to be broken by hitting it.'

Sybesma (1992, 1999) argues that there is a CAUSE head in Mandarin, which can either be overtly realized as 'ba' or be filled by the verb through head movement.

## Bei passives (Huang 1999, Liu &amp; Huang 2016)

**Long passives** (similar to tough construction)

(17) author [bei [NOP reviewer criticize-cry (NOP)]]



# bei...gei-VP

Can we use the same way to analyze 'bei... gei-VP'?

(18) tougaoren **bei** shengaoren **gei** shuo-ku le  
 author **bei** reviewer **gei** criticize-cry Asp  
 'The author was criticized to tears by the reviewer.'

(19) author[bei[NOP **reivewer gei-criticize-cry** (NOP)]]

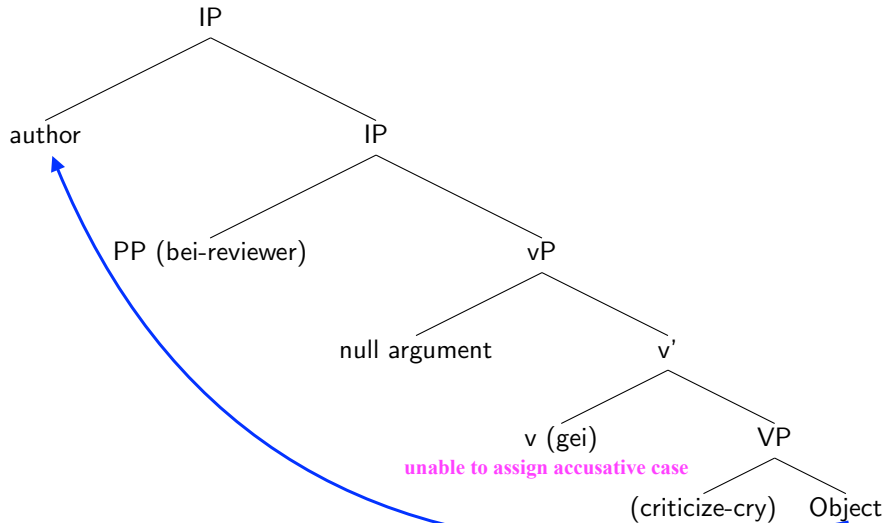
I argue that this is not a tenable analysis, as we mentioned earlier gei-VP is incompatible with an overt external argument as repeated below.

(20) \*Shengaoren **gei** shuo-ku le tougaoren  
 reviewer **gei** criticize-cry Asp author  
 'The reviewer criticized the reviewer and the reviewer ended up crying.'

## Two distinct structures with `gei` and without `gei`

# bei...gei-VP

In *bei...gei-VP*, when *gei* is present, *bei*-NP forms a Preposition Phrase.



## Short passives bei-VP vs gei-VP



# Short passives bei-VP vs gei-VP

## Gei-VP can express passive meaning without bei

- (21) huaping **gei** da-po le  
 vase **gei** hit-broken Asp  
 'The vase was hit broken.'

## Is gei-VP equivalent to short passives bei-VP?

- (22) huaping **bei** da-po le  
 vase **bei** hit-broken Asp  
 'The vase was hit-broken.'

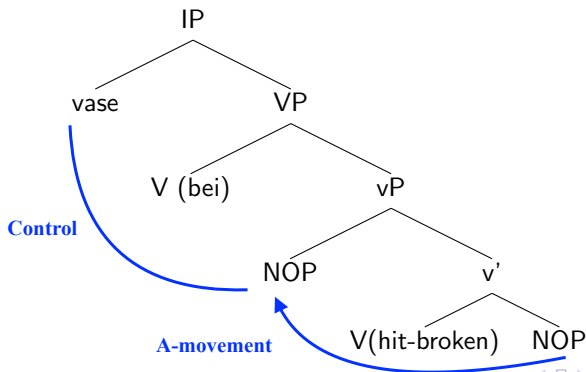
**However, unlike gei-VP, bei-VP can never occur below bei or ba construction.**

- (23) \*huaping **bei** Zhangsan **bei** da-po le  
 vase **bei** John **bei** hit-broke Asp  
 'The vase was hit-broken by John.'

# Short passives bei-VP vs gei-VP

If we follow Huang 1999 and accept the structure of short passives bei-VP as below:

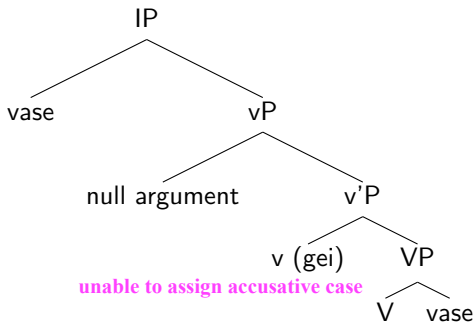
- (24) huaping **bei** da-po le  
 vase **bei** hit-broken Asp  
 'The vase was hit-broken.'



## Short passives bei-VP vs gei-VP

And we use the structure of gei-VP we proposed earlier as shown below, we could account for why bei-VP cannot occur below bei or ba constructions by saying that bei and ba can only select vP and not larger than that.

- (25) huaping **gei** da-po le  
 vase **gei** hit-broken Asp  
 'The vase was hit broken.'



Optionality of  $g_{ei}$

## bei...*gei*-VP and ba...*gei*-VP

- In 'bei...*gei*-VP' or 'ba...*gei*-VP', *gei* is optional. The addition of *gei* has little effect on either meaning or grammar. Therefore, it is tricky to pinpoint the function of *gei* because there seems to be no minimal contrast.
- One minimal contrast I notice is that when *gei*-VP is used, it does not sit well with post-verbal object. To show this point, I use the ditransitive verb 'tell someone something' as a test.

(26) Zhangsan *ba* mimi gaosu le *bie-ren*  
 John *ba* secret tell Asp *others*  
 'John told the secret to others.'

(27) \*Zhangsan *ba* mimi *gei* gaosu le *bie-ren*  
 John *ba* secret *gei* tell Asp *others*  
 'John told the secret to others.'

## bei...*gei*-VP and ba...*gei*-VP

■ Same is true with passives, when the direct object is preposed or base-generated in the subject position, and the indirect object remains post-verbal, *gei*-VP is ungrammatical in 'bei... *gei*-VP'.

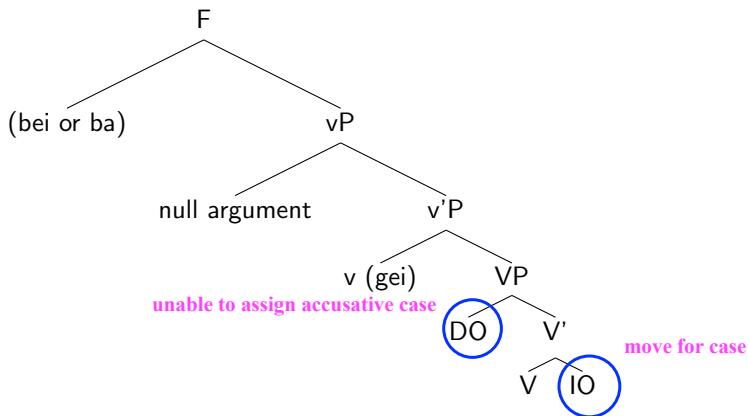
(28) mimi *bei* Zhangsan gaosu le *bie-ren*  
 secret *bei* John tell Asp *others*  
 'The secret was told to others by John.'

(29) \*mimi *bei* Zhangsan *gei* gaosu le *bie-ren*  
 secret *bei* John *gei* tell Asp *others*  
 'The secret was told to others by John.'

# bei...*gei*-VP and ba...*gei*-VP

■ I take these contrasts to be supporting evidence for my proposal on the structure of *gei* repeated below. *Bei* and *ba* can be seen as higher functional head merged above *v*P, which has the effect of dislocating the direct object.

(30)



## Conclusion



# Conclusion: Typology of passives in Mandarin

## (31) Typology

- a. **long passives without *gei***: object **BEI** [<sub>IP</sub> NOP subject VP (NOP)] A' movement
- predication    movement
- b. **long passives with *gei***: object [<sub>PP</sub> **BEI** DP] [<sub>VP</sub> pro<sub>subject</sub> **GEI-VP** (object)] pro subject + PP
- EPP attracts object movement
- c. ***gei*-VP passives**: object [<sub>VP</sub> pro<sub>subject</sub> **GEI-VP** (object)] pro subject
- EPP attracts object movement
- d. ***bei*-VP short passives**: object **BEI** [pro<sub>object</sub> VP (pro<sub>object</sub>)] A movement of pro object
- predication    movement

# Conclusion

- The core idea are that there is null arguments and various functional items (gei, long passives bei, short passive bei) available in Mandarin. These functional items select different sizes of complements. Null arguments can occupy either the subject or object position and can experience either A movement or A-bar movement.
- These choices available and their interaction give rise to various forms of passives in Mandarin on the surface.

Thank you for listening!

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