

Causative light verbs in Mandarin Chinese

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This talk will deal with the issue of Mandarin Chinese complex V-V verbs formed by means of a causative light V_1 , also in a comparative perspective, taking into account other Sinitic languages. Different languages may express causativity in different ways, according to the items available in their respective lexical inventories (cf. Ramchand 2008) and other language-specific characteristics. Mandarin Chinese has few lexical causatives (labile verbs), e.g. 开 *kāi* ‘open’ and 沉 *chén* ‘sink’; however, even when labile verbs are available, a compound form is generally preferred to express the transitive variant. The main means to express causativity in Mandarin Chinese are periphrastics means and complex verbs formed by two verbal roots (i.e. resultative compounds and verbs formed with a light V_1). The tendency to express causativity by means of compounding seems to be linked to the analytic nature of Mandarin. This is even clearer if we consider the diachronic development of the Chinese language, which is characterized by a typological shift from a synthetic to an analytic language and by a substantial change in the lexicon. These factors apparently contributed also to the change in the ways to express causativity by means of different strategies; complex causative verbs seem to emerge out of the need to compensate for the loss of other means to express complex event structures. Old Chinese possessed morphological and lexical causatives; Middle Chinese developed means such as tonal contrast and the voiced/voiceless alternation (清浊别义 *qīngzhuó bié yì*; cf. Mei 1991, Pulleyblank 2000, among others). By the time of Late Middle Chinese, all these means were extinct; Chinese developed other means, such as the resultative construction and, then, resultative compounds, where both the causing and the result events are expressed, as e.g. 摇醒 *yáo xǐng* ‘shake-awake’.

In this talk, we will not deal with resultative compounds, but, rather, we will focus only on complex V-V verbs formed with a phonetically realized light verb (带音的轻动词 *dài yīn de qīng dòngcí*), i.e. a verb that has general and abstract semantic content (see Grimshaw & Mester 1988, Feng 2005, Zhu 2005, Jie 2008), as e.g. 打 *dǎ* ‘beat, strike, hit’, 弄 *nòng* ‘make’, 搞 *gǎo* ‘do’. These verbal roots, when appearing as V_1 s of V-V compounds often do not represent a particular action, origin or manner, as in the case of resultatives, but are blurred verbs, with a general causative meaning, forming the transitive version of intransitive change-of-state verbs. Some complex verbs formed with a causative light verb are shown in (1):

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| (1) | 弄暗 <i>nòng'àn</i> ‘darken’ | 弄开 <i>nòngkāi</i> ‘open’ |
| | 弄沉 <i>nòngchén</i> ‘sink’ | 搞破 <i>gǎopò</i> ‘break’ |
| | 弄断 <i>nòngduàn</i> ‘break’ | 搞坏 <i>gǎohuài</i> ‘ruin; destroy; break’ |

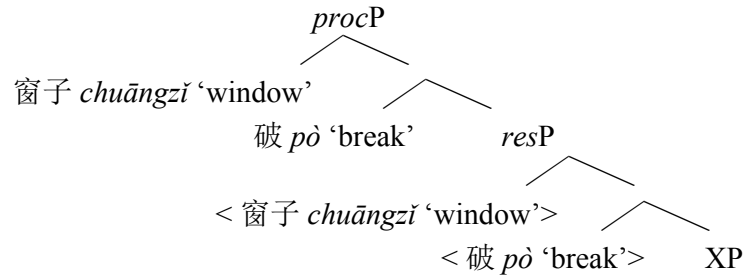
Light verbs do not give any semantic contribution to the whole complex verb. The compound verb just expresses the resultant state, leaving the causing event unspecified: different actions can bring about the resultant state. Moreover, these complex verbs can choose different kinds of subjects, showing that they can come about without the intervention of a volitional agent (see alternating verbs in English, e.g. *break*, which allow as external causes natural forces, as well as agents or instruments; cf. Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995):

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|-----|--|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| (2) | 老张 | /木头 / 台风 | 弄破 | 窗子。 |
| | <i>Lǎo Zhāng</i> | <i>mùtóu / táifēng</i> | <i>nòngpò</i> | <i>chuāngzi</i> |
| | Lao Zhang | wood / typhoon | <i>nòng-break</i> | window |
| | ‘Lao Zhang / the wood / the typhoon broke the window.’ | | | |
| | (Examples from Lin 2001:49) | | | |

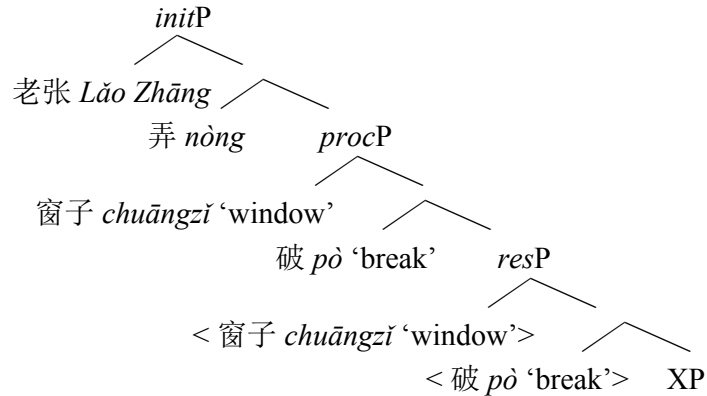
We will propose an analysis of these complex verbs adopting the framework put forth by Ramchand (2008), consisting in a syntactic decomposition of the event structure, which can be

decomposed into a maximum of three subevents: the causing (*initP*), the process (*procP*) and the result (*resP*) subevents. Each lexical item specifies the relevant information (category labels or ‘tags’) which permit its insertion in the eventive structure: e.g. Eng. *push* [init, proc], *throw* [init, proc, res]. Accordingly, we argue that the light *V*₁ represents the spell-out of the causing projection head, forming an extra layer on top of verbs which do not possess an [init] feature in their lexical entry.

- (3) a. 窗子 破 了。 破 *pò* ‘break’ [proc, res]
chuāngzi *pò* *le*
 window break ASP
 ‘The window broke.’



- b. 老张 弄破 窗子。
Lǎo Zhāng *nòngpò* *chuāngzi*
 Lao Zhang *nòng-break* window
 ‘Lao Zhang broke the window.’



Mandarin Chinese supports the view that in the causative alternation the direction of the derivation is from inchoative to causative (see e.g. Ramchand 2008) and not vice versa (see e.g. Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995, Reinhart 2002, Chierchia 2004). Moreover, we will argue that these complex verbs (as well as resultative compounds) are left-headed on a structural basis.

Among light verbs, we will illustrate one particular case, i.e. the root 打 *dǎ* ‘hit, beat, strike’. In V-V compounds 打 *dǎ* can be used either as a full verb, forming a resultative compound, or as a light verb. In a complex verb like 打死 *dǎsǐ* ‘*dǎ*-die’, the meaning of 打 *dǎ* could be either ‘beat and kill (make die) as a result’ or simply ‘kill (make die)’; in the latter case, the resultant state ‘die’ can be reached performing different actions:

- (4) 小明 开枪 打死 了 一 只 (From PKU corpus)
Xiǎo Míng *kāiqiāng* *dǎsǐ* *le* *yī* *zhī*
 Xiao Míng shoot *dǎ-die* ASP one CL
 ‘Xiao Míng killed one (bird) by shooting’

Similar roots are found in other two Sinitic languages, i.e. Taiwanese Southern Min (TSM) 拍 *phah4* ‘hit’ and Hakka 打 *da2* ‘hit’. In TSM, a simplex intransitive verb may become transitive when preceded by the dummy verb 拍 *phah4*: 拍 *phah4* serves to change the argument structure of the simplex verb (cf. Lien 1999).

- (5) 拍勾 *phah4 kiu1* ‘shrink’ 拍否 *phah4 phai2* ‘spoil’
 拍熄 *phah4 sit4* ‘extinguish’ 拍醒 *phah4 chhin2* ‘wake’
 拍破 *phah4 phoa3* ‘break’ 拍斷 *phah4 tng7* ‘break’ (Lien 1999:8)

In Hakka (Yeh 2008) the verb 打 *da2* apparently has the same function:

- (6) 打壞 *da2 fai3* ‘break’ 打毋見 *da2 m5gien3* ‘to make something disappear’
 打缺 *da2 kiet4* ‘chip’ 打巖 *da2 met8* ‘to make dirty’ (Yeh 2008:67-68)

Finally, we will illustrate another particular light verb, i.e. the root 加 *jiā* ‘increase’; our proposal is that its function is to form the transitive variant of change-of-state verbs based on a particular set of open-range adjectives. In Mandarin Chinese, stage-level adjectives (cf. Carlson 1977) can be used as eventive predicates, while individual-level adjectives can only occur in stative predication (cf. Gu 1992, Xiao & McEnery 2004, Liu 2010):

- (7) a. 天 黑 / 亮 了。
tiān hēi / liàng le
 sky black bright ASP
 ‘It got dark / downed.’
 b. 碗盘 刚 干, 你 又 要 用 了。
wǎnpán gāng gàn nǐ yòu yào yòng le
 dishes just dry you again want use ASP
 ‘The dishes have just dried and you want to use them again.’
 (Adapted from Tham 2009:5)
 c. *张三 聪明 / 笨 了。
Zhāngsān cōngmíng / bèn le
 Zhangsan clever stupid ASP
 ‘Zhangsan got clever / stupid.’

We argue that these items are endowed with verbal features and such features are listed in their lexical entry along with the adjectival ones. We will also show that these items behave as degree achievement verbs and are ambiguous between being [proc] and [proc, res] verbs (having both an atelic and a telic punctual reading). Most of these change-of-state verbs can only be used intransitively; their transitive variant is formed by adding a light verb. We will show that, among these items, those based on open-range adjectives involving an increase in some property can be transitivized by means of the root 加 *jiā* ‘increase’:

- (8) 加宽 *jiākuān* ‘increase + wide = widen’ 加深 *jiāshēn* ‘increase + deep = deepen’
 加长 *jiācháng* ‘increase + long = lengthen’ 加高 *jiāgāo* ‘increase + high = heighten’

We will highlight the differences between these verbs and resultative compounds. Moreover, we will point out that the root 加 *jiā* ‘increase’ cannot be added to verbs of change of state based on closed-range adjectives. Also, we will show that to form the transitive variant of change-of-state verbs based on open-range adjectives denoting a decrease in some properties (increase in negative properties), a *V₁* that marks the negative direction of the change in degree is required (cf. Steffen Chung 2006). We will propose that the root 加 *jiā* ‘increase’ 1) represents the causative component, forming the transitive variant of verbs of change of state based on open-

range adjectives involving an increase in the property denoted by the adjective; 2) is the spell-out of one relevant part of the logical representation, i.e. the increasing event (cf. Hay, Kennedy & Levin 1999).

Our analysis and findings will be based on a variety of data coming from different sources: the literature on the topic, dictionaries, contemporary literary texts and newspapers (mostly available on-line), corpora of Mandarin Chinese (above all the Corpus of the Center for Chinese Linguistics at Peking University – PKU corpus), Google searches.

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