

Acquiring Double Object Verbs in Mandarin

Chinese* (18pt Times New Roman Boldface)

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(12pt Times New Roman Boldface)

Abstract (12pt Times New Roman Boldface)

The present study aims to investigate Chinese children's acquisition of double object verbs with *gei*. These verbs were classified into three types, *gei*-required, *gei*-forbidden, and *gei*-optional. The following issues were examined, i.e. the difficulty levels, unmarked/marked patterns, and development of untargeted patterns. Two tasks were employed, a grammaticality task and a sentence elicitation task. Forty-five children aged from three to five and fifteen adults participated in the experiment, who were further divided into four groups, i.e. Group 1 (three-year-olds), Group 2 (four-year-olds), Group 3 (five-year-olds), and Group 4 (native controls). (11 pt Times New Roman) (300 字以內)

Keywords: Chinese, double Object Construction, L1 acquisition, Markedness (依字母排序)

1. Introduction (12pt Times New Roman Boldface)

In Chinese double object constructions, one of the most crucial elements in determining the order of the direct and the indirect objects, however, is *gei*. *Gei* is a word with multiple functions and thus can be treated as belonging to different syntactic

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categories based on its meanings. As a verb, for instance, *gei* can be used in a double object structure like (1), meaning ‘give.’ Interestingly, *gei* can also combine with other verbs such as *song* ‘give’ in the same structure, as exemplified in (2).

- (1) *Wo gei le Zhangsan yi ben shu.* (Yang 1991:11)

I *GEI* ASP Zhangsan one CL book
‘I gave Zhangsan a book.’
- (2) *Wo song gei le Zhangsan yi ben shu.*

I give *GEI* ASP Zhangsan one CL book
‘I gave Zhangsan a book.’

2. Linguistic Properties and Literature Review of Double Object Verbs

2.1 Linguistic Properties of Double Object Verbs

Verbs of the same type as *dai* in (4)a usually imply physical transfer of objects and they do not involve the full meaning of ‘giving,’ i.e. [—Giving]. Therefore, when a Goal is added, the following *Gei*-insertion Rule applies to enhance the giving feature of the verb (Author 1998; Author 2001).

2.2.1 *Gei*-required Verbs (GRV) (11pt Times New Roman)

The present study consisted of three experimental groups and one control group. The experimental groups were made up of 45 preschoolers aged from three to five from a private Catholic kindergarten in southern Taiwan. The control group was composed of 15 native Mandarin-speaking adults whose mean age was 20.

Osgood and Zehler (1981) examined the effects of prototypicality and sentence complexity on children’s acquisition of English double object constructions. Their subjects consisted of sixteen children in each age group, three-, four-, and five-year-olds. Thirty-two sentences were examined, sixteen of which were dative and the other sixteen ditransitive. Four levels of prototypicality along with four levels of complexity were employed. The children were asked to perform two tasks; the first was an act out task, and the second, a production task.

Table 1: Basic Information of the Subjects

Group	Age	Mean	Gender		Number
1 (3-year-olds)	3;5~3:11	3;6	Male	9	15
			Female	6	
2 (4-year-olds)	4;5~4:11	4;6	Male	6	15

			Female	9	
3 (5-year-olds)	5;5~5:11	5;6	Male	6	15
			Female	9	
4 (control group)	18;4~22;4	20;4	Male	7	15

As can be seen in Figure 1, the three types of verbs demonstrated a developmental trend for each age group.

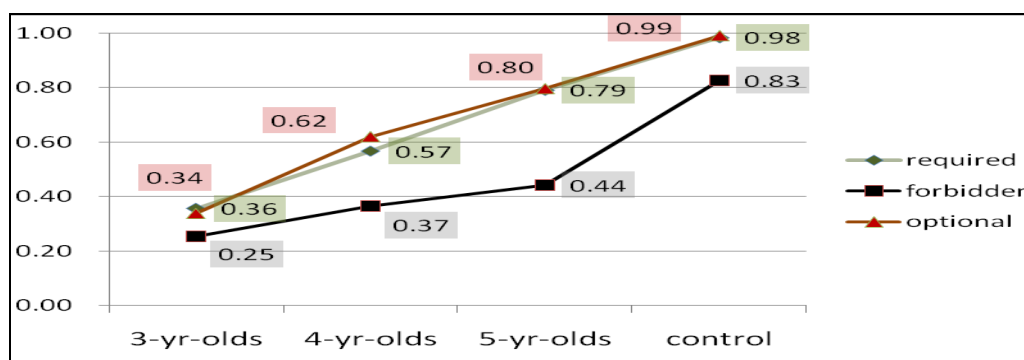


Figure 1: Subjects' Mean Scores of the Three Types of Double Object Verbs

For *gei*-required verbs, the mean scores for the three-, four-, and the five-year-olds were .36, .57, and .79, respectively¹. The same trend was found in response to *gei*-forbidden and *gei*-optional verbs. As the subjects' age increased, their performance improved. The results of one-way ANOVA also revealed that the different mean scores between groups reached a significant level for all the three types of verbs ($F(3, 56)=52.785$, $p=.000$ for *gei*-required verbs; $F(3, 56)=52.926$, $p=.000$ for *gei*-forbidden verbs; and $F(3, 56)=58.441$, $p=.000$ for *gei*-optional verbs).

3. Conclusion (12pt Times New Roman Boldface)

Last but not least, our subjects' preference for the relative order of the DO and IO contradicted what Givón (2001) has found concerning his Thematic Hierarchy. Therefore, to have a complete picture of the use of the alternative patterns of double object verbs, it would be necessary to also investigate children's daily use of these verbs. That is, a corpus study can be conducted to see whether their preferences for certain pattern are consistent with the results we obtained or the Thematic Hierarchy proposed by Givón (2001).

¹ The mean score for each age group was derived by the correct responses divided by the four items for each verb type.

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² 1. 內文引用與最末引用文獻務必一致。
2. 多人作者：第一作者姓加名，其後名加姓。
3. 英文作者僅中間名可縮寫。

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