

Frontiers in Chinese Linguistics

Volume 2

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Jiajuan Xiong

Chinese Middle Constructions

Lexical Middle Formation



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For my constant reflection

It is by driving the peg of the conceit ‘am’ that a world is measured out, construed or postulated...That is to say, together with the notion ‘am’ there arises a ‘here’. ‘Here’ am I, he is ‘there’ and you are ‘yon’ or in front of me. This is the basic ground plan for the grammatical structure, known to grammar as the first, the second and the third person. A world comes to be measured out and a grammatical structure springs up. This, in fact, is the origin of proliferation, or papañca. So it is the freedom from that proliferation that is meant by the expression *nev’idha na huraṃ na ubhayamantarena*, “neither here nor there nor between the two”. The notion of one’s being in the world, or the bifurcation as ‘I’ and ‘the world’, is no longer there. *Es’ev’anto dukkhassa*, this, then, is the end of suffering, Nibbāna.

Nibbāna—The Mind Stilled

(Volume - III: 327)

By Venerable Katukurunde Ñāṇananda
Bhikkhu

Preface of *Frontiers in Chinese Linguistics*

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FiCL is the sister series of *语言学前言丛书*, a prestigious book series published in Chinese by Peking University Press since 2000. The series introduces new theories and new ideas in Chinese linguistics to the wide communities of linguists in China as well as Chinese linguists overseas. Since 2010, in order to bring a broader international perspective and impact, *语言学前言丛书* has entered a collaborative publication agreement with the PolyU-PKU Joint Research Centre on Chinese Linguistics (RP2U2). Both party work jointly to form the editorial board and academic advisory committee, in order to ensure more rigorous academic review process as well as to facilitate introduction of inter-disciplinary pioneering topics to the series.

The collaboration with Springer-Nature adds a third world-leading partner to this joint publication series. This new arrangement will allow the series to publish excellent monographs written in English as well as ensure that all publications are equally accessible in China and overseas. With the new arrangement, we also propose to introduce two new types of publications that were not published by *语言学前言丛书* before. One type is the thematic collection of excellent papers from international conferences, these papers typically represent the forefront of the field. The other is from the new initiative also started by Peking University Press and RP2U2 to select a Ph.D. thesis of the year on Chinese linguistics through worldwide call and competition. The award-winning theses would also represent the

newest breakthroughs in the field and we plan to publish the excellent award-winning thesis of the year after review and revision.

Last but not the least, *FiCL* will be included in major international scientific indexes such as SCOPUS and Google Scholar. With the competition in the field, effective indexing and sharing are essential to the reputation of the publication as well as the authors whose theses are published in the series. Your contribution as author, reviewer, reader, and submitter is essential to the success of this book series.

Hong Kong, China
Beijing, China
February 2017

Chu-Ren Huang
Rui Guo

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The exploration on the Middle Path is by no means easy, but it is intellectually rewarding. The completion of this book depended on a large variety of conditions; to those who have contributed to this study, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks.

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Abbreviations

ACT/0	Active inflection (the verb stem can only be active)
ASSO	Associative marker
CR	Correlative
F	Feminine
GEN	Genitive marker
GER	Gerundive
IMP	Imperfective
M	Masculine
MID/A	Middle inflection (the verb stem can also be active)
MM	Middle marker
N	Neuter
NOM	Nominative
OPT	Optative
PL	Plural marker
PRED	Predicates
PREP	Preposition
PROP	Proprietary
PRET	Present
REL	Relative marker
VOC	Vocative
1SG	First-person singular

Abstract

This book is an exploration of Chinese middle constructions, which starts with distinguishing the middle construction from the middle voice, considering that these two terms have long been used interchangeably with different connotations. Consequently, middle data presented in the literature vary tremendously, both intra-linguistically and inter-linguistically. In order to delineate a clear boundary for the middle construction, this study defines it as a generic semantic category with the obligatory non-realization of a verb's highest argument. By contrast, the middle voice is a morphological category with various syntactic and semantic features.

Starting from the working definition arrived at, the study identifies several middle constructions, viz., the *qilai* middle, the *hao* middle, the *rongyi/nan* middle, the *de* middle (and the *te* middles in Chengdu Chinese), the *bu* middle, and transitive middles. Most of these middle constructions come with middle markers, though these are both morphologically and syntactically diversified. In the case of transitive middles, middle formation depends on an idiosyncratic argument realization of a small group of verbs and does not include markers. In this sense, the presence of middle markers is not a design feature of Chinese middles. Moreover, the occurrence of the identified middle markers does not necessarily lead to a middle analysis, because they can also mark other constructions, e.g., the *qilai* unaccusative construction, the *rongyi/nan* tough construction, and the *de*-resultative unaccusative construction.

Syntax-wise, Chinese middles can have both complex predicates (e.g., [V-*qilai* AP] and [*rongyi/nan* V]) and simple predicates (e.g., *hao*-V, V-*de*-A, V-*bu*-A, V-*te*-A, V-*te*), both of which are proved to be unergative in nature. Consequently, these middle constructions are collectively termed “unergative middles”, which stand in contrast with “transitive middles” in terms of transitivity. However, “unergative middles” and “transitive middles” share one property: they do not involve any movement mechanisms. Therefore, both of them are subsumed under the rubric of “lexical middles”, which in addition exhibit the cross-linguistic lexical middle properties proposed by both Marelj (2004) and Lekakou (2005).

This study is the first to adopt a parametric approach to Chinese middle constructions. It adds Chinese to languages like English, Dutch, and German on the list of lexical middle languages, to be distinguished from syntactic middle languages like French, Italian, Portuguese, and Serbian/Croatian.