ABSTRACT

In contemporary Mandarin, the morpheme "gei" is a verb meaning "give". However, "gei" has also developed into various grammatical markers expressing passive, disposal, beneficiary, etc. By using the theoretical framework of functionalism and cognitive linguistics, as well as performing a synchronic and diachronic study, this thesis addresses the use of "gei" as a passive marker.

The first part of this thesis is a comparison of the passive marker "gei" with the other three passive markers: "bei", "jiao" and "rang". These passive markers have overlapping usage in Mandarin, yet to date no one has done any sort of systematic comparison on them. This thesis attempts to explore their differences from three areas: frequency of use, syntactic behaviour and meaning. My study shows that the function of "gei" is not totally identical with the other three passive markers.

In addition, this thesis attempts to explain how "gei" evolved from a verb originally meaning "give" into a passive marker. We argue that the causative usage of "gei" is a crucial link between the verb meaning "give" and the passive marker. With diachronic and synchronic evidence, we show that the evolution of the "give" verb into a passive marker, far from being arbitrary, has cognitive foundations, which play an important role in the grammaticalisation of the verb meaning "give" into a passive marker.

The present analysis has shown that the development of "gei" as a grammatical device is not arbitrary, but to a large extent motivated by semantic and cognitive factors. We have to go beyond linguistic structures in order to obtain a better explanation of grammar.