

On the Excessive Construction in Mandarin Chinese

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This paper explores the excessive construction, formally represented as ‘V ta ge N’ and illustrated in (1), in Mandarin Chinese in terms of construction grammar. In view of its syntactic and semantic peculiarities, the excessive construction cannot be identified with any of the established constructions in the grammar. Rather, it is argued to represent a new type. Syntactically, the excessive construction demands a non-referential ta and an indefinite NP consisting of a numeral-classifier(-noun) sequence. Semantically, the excessive construction allows only a volitional agent and denotes a telic situation. The constructional meaning of the excessive construction is postulated as ‘above an implicit norm’, instead of the generally recognized ‘to one’s satisfaction’. This connotation is assumed to derive from ta, whose original meaning constrains later semantic developments of the construction. The constructional analysis proposed in the paper allows language users to apply the familiar pattern to new contexts in principled ways, providing a motivated account of use with novel ‘verbs’.

- (1) a. mai ta ge yibai ben shu
 買 他 個 一百 本 書
 buy TA GE one-hundred CL book
 ‘To buy 100 books’
- b. wan ta ge guoyin
 玩 他 個 過癮
 play TA GE to:one’s:satisfaction
 ‘to play to a thorough satisfaction of it.’