

A Study of Ditransitive Verbs in Archaic Chinese

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Abstract

The thesis examines the use of the GIVE verbs *yǔ* 與, *cì* 賜 and *xiàn* 獻 and the SAY verbs *yù* 語, *yán* 言, *wèn* 問 and *gào* 告 in Archaic Chinese, focusing particularly on the issue of why *yú* 於 was used with the recipient in some cases but not in the others. The verbs are studied across different texts composed between 11th century B.C. and 2nd century B.C. There was a strict distinction in marking observed in the postverbal nominals. The recipient of *xiàn* 獻, *yán* 言, *wèn* 問 and *gào* 告 was marked by *yú* 於 while the theme was unmarked. However, such a strict distinction disappeared later in the language, resulting in the change from “V(T)*yú* 於 R” to “V(T)R”. This study will try to capture this change from the perspectives of ditransitive alignment and valence change, both of which are correlated with the alignment of the verbs. Following Zhang (2008, 2009), the alignment of the verbs is an extension of the alignment types of ditransitive constructions. The verb that takes a recipient as its primary object is regarded as verb of secundative alignment (R=P); the verb that takes a theme as its direct object is regarded as verb of indirective alignment (T=P) and the verb that takes either a recipient object or a theme object is regarded as verb of neutral alignment (T=P=R). We claim that the cause of the syntactic change from “V(T)*yú* 於 R” to “V(T)R” was the omission of *yú* 於 and the effect of this change was the increase in syntactic valence. Following the omission of *yú* 於, the alignment of the construction changed and this implied a change in the alignment of the verbs. The verbs of indirective alignment *xiàn* 獻, *yán* 言, *wèn* 問 and *gào* 告 showed the property of the verb of neutral alignment after the change. Eventually, these verbs started to appear in the “VRT” construction.