

Gei³ta¹ in Taiwan Mandarin--- A Particular Construction*

Chiachun Lee

Nan-Jeon Institute of Technology, Department of Applied English,
737-46, No.178. Chaochin Rd. Yianshui Town, Tainan County. Taiwan
chiachun@njtc.edu.tw

Abstract. The present paper investigates a particular structure in Taiwan Mandarin, “(NP) + (intensifier) + *gei³ta¹* “give him/it”+ adjective” in terms of construction grammar. The structure is mostly observed in utterances of younger generation. Though it is not regarded as a grammatical or standard structure, it is still a register of language. The structure lays emphasis on speaker’s attitude toward an undesired, unpleasant event. In most cases, the attitude tends to be negative. The events or propositions must have existed or been completed. The adjectives compatible with this structure belong to category of higher degree. The grammatical usage illustrates semantic bleaching of *gei³ta¹*. And the changes from giving to a grammatical particle denoting subjective belief is a kind of subjectification. Moreover, *ta¹* could refer to events or situation expressed by a more complicated grammatical structure, or denotes nothing as a dummy word. Though many previous studies paid attention to the newly developed structure resulted from language contact, the adequate account was not provided. It is hoped through this investigation, we will get a better understanding of this particular structure.

Keywords: *gei³ta¹*, construction meaning, speaker’s subjective attitude/belief, negative, event

1. Introduction

Taiwan Mandarin is the result of language contact between Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese Southern Min(TSM). There have been plenty of investigations on novel usages brought about by influence from TSM, including Kubler(1985), Tsai(2002) and Zeng(2003). However, these previous investigations mainly focus on the differences between Mandarin and Taiwan Mandarin. Few efforts were made to provide an adequate account on these newly emerged sentence structures. In the present paper, I am going to be concerned with one particular construction which are newly developed structure. In modern Taiwan Mandarin there are two particular structures evoking *gei³ta¹*. One is descriptive expressions, “*gei³ta¹* + adjective”. The other one is resultative structure, “verb + *gei³ta¹* + complement”. These two sentence structures could be regarded as the result of language contact. The former structure is more novel and is confined in ordinary utterances of younger generation. Instead of their content meaning of a giving verb and the third person pronoun, *gei³ta¹* function like an infix for the purpose of denoting speakers’ undesired and unpleasant attitude toward on the event mentioned. The corresponding combination of giving word and the third person pronoun in TSM do not have the similar function. Thus, the present paper aims at pinning down the function and features conveyed by the construction “(NP) + (intensifier) + *gei³ta¹* + adjective” in TM from the perspective of construction grammar proposed by Goldberg(1995, 2006). Through careful investigation on this novel structure, it is proven once again that language has its own life. It will be influenced by surrounding languages and has its own development. The data used as examples are attracted from, mainly blogs, internet and radio programs in Taiwan. The

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paper is organized by the following parts. Chapter 2 tackle with the function and features of the structure “(NP) + (intensifier) + *gei³ta¹* + adjective”, including its syntactic variations and features of the compatible adjectives, the function of *gei³ta¹*, the reference of *ta¹*. Chapter 3 is conclusion.

2. The structure “*gei³ + ta¹* + adjective” in TM

2.1 Construction meaning

Based on Goldberg (2006), grammatical constructions are conventionalized pairings of form and function. She claims that constructions bear specific function, especially idiosyncratic structure.¹ While verbs are important in semantics of a construction, construction also denotes certain kind of meaning. Moreover, CG claims that different surface structure spells different meaning. Furthermore, CG also take information structure and pragmatics into consideration. In the step of mapping from semantics to syntax, not all roles in frame are necessarily profiled in surface structure. Some could be omitted if they are recoverable from the context or they are of no importance in information.

In this study, I am going to investigate the newly developed construction in terms of CG on account of the following reasons. First, this construction is signified by its characteristics. This structure amplifies speaker’s emotive evaluation on undesired or unpleasant event or situation. The event or situation must be realis. That is to say that, it must be fact. Second, the adjectives compatible with this structure must be adjectives with higher degree. General adjectives are seldom found in this structure.

There are two kinds of special structures evoking “*gei³ + ta¹*”² in TM. Type I, descriptive expressions, “*gei³ta¹* + adjective” and “*gei³ta¹* + verb”. The other one is resultative structure, “verb + *gei³ta¹* + complement”. In the present study, the focus is on “*gei³ta¹* + adjective”. The core part of the structure is “*gei³ta¹* + adjective”. By adding adverbs there are several variations³:

1. *gei³ta¹* + *ge⁰* + N
 - a. *Wo³ zhan⁴zai⁴ yuan² di⁴ bu⁴ zhi¹dao⁴ yiao⁴ shuo¹ sha²,*
I stand at original place NOT know will speak what
zhen¹shi⁴ gei³ta¹ ge⁰ bu⁴ yu³ zhi⁴ pien⁴
really GEI TA CL not give place comment
Standing at the original place without knowing what to say, I really do not intend to give any comment.
 - b. *Wo³ jüe²de² jin¹tian¹ zhen¹de⁰hen³gei³ta¹ge⁰ jin⁴bao⁴*
I feel today really very GEI Ta CL surprise
Today, I really feel very much surprised.
2. *gei³ta¹* + ADJP
 - a. *ta¹ suo³xue²de⁰ fan²wei² zhen¹de⁰shi⁴ you³dian³ gei³ta¹ za²*
he learn field really be a little GEI TA complicated
What he learned was a little complicated.
3. *fei¹chang²* + *gei³ta¹* + ADJ
 - a. *jin³ji² xun²zhao³...(fei¹chang² gei³ta¹ jin³ji²)*
urgent look for (very much GEI TA urgent)
Look for something in emergency. (Extremely in emergency)
4. (*zhen¹de⁰* +) *you³dian³* + *gei³ta¹* + ADJ
 - a. *Tian¹yu³chuan²shuo¹... zhen¹de⁰you³dian³ gei³ta¹ wu²liao² shuo¹*
Tianyuchanshuo(a puppet play) really a little GEI TA boring speak
Tianyuchanshuo is really very boring.

¹ For more details, please take reference to Goldberg (2006:6, 7).

² The character of third person pronoun is “他” or “它”. “他” is human 3rd person pronoun. “它” usually denotes unanimated objects/matters or animated animals, excluding human. Though there are different characters presenting different gender of the third person personal pronouns, the male third person pronoun is more general than female one, especially in informal situations. Thus, in original data both “他” and “它” are observed.

³ I use Hanyu Pinyin for transliteration of Chinese words. Some function lexemes are not clearly explained. Instead, I use capitalized letters, such as CL is classifier, LE is a marker indicating the completion of event or changes. LA is a sentence final particle. NOM is nominalization marker. NOT is negation.

5. *zhen¹de⁰ + gei³ta¹ + you³dian³ + ADJ*
 a. *shuo¹ zhen¹de⁰ ni³de⁰ fan³ying⁴ zhen¹de⁰ you³dian³ gei³ta¹ chi²dun⁴ le⁰shuo¹*
 speak the truth your reaction really a little GEI TA slow LE speak

To tell the truth, your reaction is really a little slow.

6. *zhen¹(shi⁴) + gei³ta¹ + you³gou⁴ + ADJ*
 a. *kuang²dao¹ zhen¹de⁰shi⁴ gei³ta¹ you³gou⁴ shuai⁴ de⁰la⁰*
 Kuangdao⁴ really be GEI TA very much handsome DE LA
 Kuangdao is really handsome.

In the 1st token, *gei³* is a verb of giving. The noun following *gei³ta¹* is the theme transferred. The goal of giving action is *ta¹*. The three internal arguments of giving verb are realized, though the theme transferred is abstract. These themes are nominalized by the classifier *ge⁰*. This structure could be regarded as residue of original functions as a giving verb. In the other variations, the constituent following *gei³ta¹* is no longer a noun, instead, these elements compatible could be adjectives. Thus, *gei³* is not a verb and *ta¹* not a goal. In the first type of variations *gei³ta¹* is obligatory because *gei³* is still a main verb in the clause while in the other variations it is no longer essential. Thus, there are some changes in syntax and semantics in *gei³* and *ta¹*. That will be investigated in the later section. With regard to the other variations, the syntactic distribution could be summarized as the following pattern:

- (3) (*zhen¹/zhen¹de⁰/ zhen¹shi⁴/ zhen¹de⁰shi⁴* ‘truly, really,+’) *gei³ta¹* (+ *fei¹chang²*, ‘very much’/ *you³dian³* ‘a little’/ *you³gou⁴*, ‘enough’) + ADJ

“*zhen¹/zhen¹de⁰/ zhen¹shi⁴/ zhen¹de⁰shi⁴*” emphasizes the validity of the following evaluation. In our data, *gei³ta¹* must go after this type of adverbs. Moreover, their syntactic position must precede adverbs modifying adjectives, including *fei¹chang²/ you³dian³/ you³gou⁴*. The relative position between *gei³ta¹* and intensifier is more flexible. These degree adverbs come before or follow after *gei³ta¹*.

The structure in question is featured with the following quality. First, the structure expresses speaker’s subjective evaluation. Second, the goal of evaluation is factivity. Third, the adjectives tend to be negative in most cases, though the positive ones are compatible.

The concept of subjectivity here is defined as that a construction or a particular item should make reference to speaker for its interpretation. Take the following pair of sentences as a example (Smet and Verstraete, 2006: 367).

- (4) a. Mum won’t let us go out tonight. I asked her but she said we had partied more than enough this week.
 b. Judith won’t be late. She never is.

In (4) a, *won’t* expresses Mum’s unwillingness to give permission to them to go out at night. In(4) b, *won’t* describes speaker’s judgment on the matter that whether Judith is likely to be late or not. The speaker reasons on the basis of Judith’s previous behavior. Because it “refers to a judgment by the speaker rather than an action or a characteristic of one of the clausal participants” (Smet and Verstraete, 2006: 367), sentence (b) is subjective while sentence (a) is not. In the concept of subjectivity the speaker should be included in the interpretation. Take the following “minimal pair” sentences as examples.

- (5) a. *ta¹ suo³xue² de⁰ fan²wei² zhen¹de⁰shi⁴ you³dian³ gei³ta¹ za²*
 He learning NOM field really a little GET TA complicated

What he learned was a little complicated.

- b. *ta¹ suo³xue²de⁰ fan²wei² zhen¹de⁰shi⁴ you³dian³ za²*
 He learning NOM field really a little complicated
 What he learned was a little complicated.

- (6) a. *Ah! Kai¹ Xiao³hei¹ chu¹qu⁴ you³dian³ gei³ta¹ wei²xian³*
 Ah! Drive Xiaohei out have a little GEI TA danger

Ah! Driving Xiaohei(black car) is a kind of danger.

- b. *Ah! Kai¹ Xiao³hei¹ chu¹qu⁴ you³dian³ wei²xian³*
 Ah! Drive Xiaohei out have a little danger
 Ah! Driving Xiaohei(black car) is a kind of danger.

In these minimal pair sets, sentences b are more general while sentences a manifests the emphasis of speaker’s emotion. Though sentences b also indicates speaker’s evaluation on the matter talked about, the addition of *gei³ta¹* specifies the matter being judged. In (5) a the evaluation of “complication” is based on speaker’s understanding of his field of study, and in (6) a “danger” is a judgment from speaker’s

⁴ Kuangdao is a character in a puppet play.

knowledge of the car or of the person will drive the car. The interpretation of the evaluation should make reference to speaker's understanding of the real world.

2.2 The adjectives in the construction

As far as the adjectives are concerned, only intransitive adjectives are observed, for examples, *wu²liao²* boring, *chi²duen⁴* slow (in thought or action), *za²* complicated, *bu²iao⁴lian³* shameless, *bu⁴shuang³* angry, *wue²xian³* dangerous, *jin³zhang¹* nervous. From the data, it is observed that about 70% of the predicates observed in our data are negative while approximately 30% of these adjectives are positive.

Table 1: The percentage of adjective quality

	number	percentage	examples
negative adjectives	120	70%	<i>bu⁴shuang³</i> not well, <i>chi²duen⁴</i> slow (in thought or action), <i>bu²iao⁴lian³</i> shameless, <i>wue²xian³</i> dangerous
positive adjectives	48	30%	<i>shuai⁴</i> handsome, <i>xing⁴fu²</i> happy, <i>hao³kan⁴</i> beautiful, <i>hao³ting¹</i> pleasant to hear
total	168	100%	

In this construction, *gei³* and *ta¹* do not keep their respective original function. It carries more grammatical meaning, especially pragmatically. On the one hand, *gei³ta¹* could be regarded as an expletive. In English, there is also expletive to stress the emotion of speaker, such as *bloody* in *per-bloody-haps*, *inde-bloody-pendent*. Macmillian(1980) claims that infixing is emotive stress amplifier and semantically neutral. The additional insertion entails emotive factors, such as taboo violation, vehemence, (dis)approval, playfulness and irritation. On the contrary, Adams(2001, 2004) argues that the inserts add lexical meaning to their matrices in addition to emotive intensity. In addition to emotional intensity, it also conveys lexical meaning, such as humor, which depends on its relationship to verbal context at the same time. Growing numbers of examples suggest that the rules of infixing and interposing are changing and more flexible. *gei³ta¹* in TM, like *bloody* in English functions as an expletive to stress emotion. It seems that *gei³ta¹* is empty in meaning. But through careful investigation, it implies lexical meaning.

The differences between sentences of these “minimal pairs” lie in the attachment of *gei³ta¹*. There is no difference in lexical meaning between the two sentences of the same pair. That means *gei³ta¹* is not an obligatory. Like the expletive in English, *gei³ta¹* not only involves the amplification of speakers' emotion, it also has its own lexical meaning. With regard to its function as an emotive stress amplifier, *gei³ta¹* changes a detached report of an event into an expression of personal involvement, especially speakers' unpleasant and undesired feeling. In these pairs of sentences above, sentence a conveys more than sentence b in terms of speakers' subjective attitude and emotive reaction toward the event being mentioned.

According to Shetter(2000), Spanish, French and German have ethical pronoun to express speakers' caring. However, in other languages ethical pronoun is first person pronoun. Fogsgaard(2005) claims that what the ethical dative does is “to introduce the enunciator directly in the reference scene of the utterance and so put an extra stress on the interest taken in that scene, the evaluation regarding the emotional importance of the event.” *Gei³ta¹* involves two subparts in meaning. One is the source, that is the speaker. The other is the goal of giving, the event or situation being evaluated. In spite of the loss of content meaning of *gei³ta¹*, the addition of it reminds addressee the existence of addresser and event. *Gei³Ta¹* is somewhat like an ethical dative which highlights speaker's implication.

Traugott(2003:125) interprets subjectivity as the way in which natural languages, in their structure and their normal manner of operation, provide for the locutionary agent's expression of himself and his own attitudes and beliefs. Finegan (1995) holds that language expresses not only objective consideration on preposition but also speakers' perspective, affect and epistemic modality. In addition to stress on speaker's subjective emotion, the structure in question profiles speaker's position in utterance reference scene by which speaker has much closer correlation with his utterances.

2.3 The reference of *ta¹*

Though *gei³ta¹* carries more pragmatic function, in order to have sufficient understanding about its essence, it is absolutely crucial to figure out its lexical meaning. The reference of *ta¹* will be discussed

firstly. Regarding to the antecedent of pronoun, *ta*¹ in our data are classified as pleonastic and referential. There are two kinds of linguistic references, exophora and endophora. Exophora is reference to something extralinguistic. For example,

(10) *that chair over there is John's*

The words “that” and “there” in the above example are exophoric because they indicate the direction of the chair referred to. Endophora is to something intralinguistic, i.e. in the same text.

(11) *I saw Pam yesterday. She was lying on the beach.*

In the sentence “she” is intralinguistic because it refers to “Pam” in prior expression. Based on the data, referential *ta*¹ could be a type of endophora. It could refer to something else already mentioned in the preceding utterances. Observation shows that the referential *ta*¹ refers to events, propositions or situations. According Gundel et al.(2004), events, as well as facts, propositions, situations and other ‘higher-order’ entities are often introduced into discourse by non-nominal constituents like clauses, sequences of clauses and verb phrase. Similarly, the references of *ta*¹ are expressed by more complicated and higher constituents.

(12) a. *Zhe⁴ ci⁴ de⁰ ban¹ju⁴ hen³ duo¹ ren² dao²*

This time DE class gathering very many people reach

zhen¹shi⁴gei³ta¹ you³yi⁴dian³ jing¹yia²

really GEITA a kind of surprising

Many people took part in classmates reunion. It really makes me surprised

b. *Ming²tian¹zhong¹wu³shi⁴wuo³gen¹xi³huan¹de⁰nü³hai²*

tomorrow noon be I and like DE girl

di⁴yi¹ci⁴ dan¹du² Yüe¹hui⁴, gei³ta¹ fen³ jin³zhan¹

the first time separately date GEITA very nervous

I am going to have a date with the girl I love at noon tomorrow. It makes me very nervous.

The reference of *ta*¹ in a is a fact that many classmates attended classmate reunion. Similarly, *ta*¹ in c refers to one's first date with the girl he likes. Both events in b and c are presented by clause.

Asher(1993) regards that eventualities have a relatively high degree of world immanence, since such entities have spatialtemporal location and causal efficacy. Because of the high degree of world immanence, eventualities are available to immediately subsequent with *ta*¹. Thus, in summary, *ta*¹ is an event-related argument. Moreover, the events denoted by *ta*¹ are interpreted as reason contributing to the final result, such as sentence (13) or a matter or issue on which speakers to make a comment, sentence (14) b.

(13) *Ting¹ lao³yin¹yue⁴de⁰xia²chan³,*

Listen to old music DE result

jiu⁴shi⁴hui⁴ muo⁴ming² gei³ta¹shang¹gan³qi³lai²

JIU BE will without any reason GEITA sad start to

The result of listening to old music is starting to get sad without any reasons.

(14) *XX gou⁴wu⁴wan³yie⁴ you³gou⁴gei³ta¹bu⁴zhuan¹yie⁴*

xx buy objects webpage enough GEITA NOT professional

xx shopping webpage is very unprofessional.

In terms of information structure, presentation of a clausally introduced entity within the topic of an utterance is one of the ways to promote salience, and bring the entity into focus. *Gei³ta¹*, the repetition of the event mentioned previously not only indicates reasons or topics but also emphasize speaker's attitude, feeling.

The pleonastic *ta*¹ could not find any antecedent to refer to, even in the whole context.

(15) a. *wuo⁴hu³cang²long² zhen¹de⁰gei³ta¹chao¹hao³kan⁴*

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon truly GEITA very nice see

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon is really a good movie

b. *tai²wan¹ba¹dian³dang³lian²xü⁴ju⁴ zhen¹shi⁴gei³ta¹bu⁴hao³kan⁴*

Taiwan 8 o'clock soap opera really GEITA NOT nice watch

In Taiwan the soap opera at eight o'clock was really bad.

3. Conclusion

“(NP) + (intensifier) + *gei³ta¹* + adjective” is a newly developed expression which is frequently observed in utterances spoken by younger generation in Taiwan. In comparison with the corresponding expressions in Mandarin, the usage of *gei³ta¹* amplifies speaker's emotional attitude,

mostly negative. In some cases, the third person pronoun could refer to an event or situation but in other cases *ta'* does not denote anything like a dummy word. The path of change could roughly depicted as:
transfer of object > evaluative situation > textual/metalinguistic meaning >
subjective attitude toward proposition

The adequate and explicit path of grammatical change needs deeper investigation. On the other hand, there is still another way to account the change. One of the reviewer suggests that *gei³ta'* could be analyzed semantically as a two-place predicate with an event argument and an individual argument, representing as the following :

lamda lamda_x [SP_NEG_ATT(e) & High-Degree (e) & Theme (e,x)]

The reason why *gei³ta'* is followed by adjective is that the degree of the event must be specified as a high scale. The analysis provides another perspective to explain this structure. It deserves further investigations. Moreover, the motivations for the change are also another issue which deserve further research. It is assumed that the newly developed structure originates from Taiwan Southern Min because in Taiwan Mandarin the functions of *gei³* could correspond to *ka⁷* in TSM. However, the adequacy of the assumption needs further study.

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