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# THE GRAMMATICALIZATION OF THE BENEFACTIVE VERB GIVE IN THAI AND MANDARIN: AN APPRECIATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY VIA FORMAL SYNTACTIC COMPARISON WITH ENGLISH

Parichart Kluensuwan<sup>1</sup>, Wachiraporn Kijpoonphol<sup>2\*</sup>, Supath Kookiattikoon<sup>1</sup>,  
Liang Hu<sup>3</sup>, Dobrorodniy Danila<sup>4</sup>, and Ye Jia<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Education, Shinawatra University, Thailand, Email: Parichart.k@siu.ac.th, supath.k@siu.ac.th

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Liberal Arts, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand, Email: wachiraporn.k@ubu.ac.th

<sup>3</sup>School of Foreign Studies, Suqian University, China, Email: huliang@squ.edu.cn

<sup>4</sup>International Institute of Management and Business, Belarus, Email: fyoannaa@gmail.com

<sup>5</sup>Sichuan Top IT Vocational Institute, China, Email: yejia1213@sina.com

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Corresponding Author: Wachiraporn Kijpoonphol  
(wachiraporn.k@ubu.ac.th)

## ABSTRACT

*This paper offers a formal analysis of the grammaticalization of the verb give in Thai (hâi) and Mandarin (gěi). Building on a generative, structural-reanalysis approach (Roberts & Roussou, 2003), it is argued that while both languages extend give into applicative and benefactive functions (Marantz, 1993; Pylkkänen, 2008), only Thai has further grammaticalized it into a clause-embedding functional head, serving as a complementizer or infinitival marker (Bisang, 1991; Jenks, 2011). By contrast, Mandarin gěi remains restricted to verbal/prepositional and serial verb functions, and purported complementizer uses (Ting & Chang, 2004) are more appropriately analyzed in terms of event structure, argument selection, and general properties of serial verb constructions. The paper supports this reanalysis with detailed syntactic diagnostics and a critical reassessment of prior complementizer proposals, showing that the Thai-Mandarin contrast reflects differences in how languages exploit the hierarchy of functional projections rather than in underlying semantic potential. The findings suggest that grammaticalization outcomes depend on language-specific syntactic resources made available by Universal Grammar, rather than on semantic extension alone (von Stechow, 1995). From a broader comparative perspective, these differences in grammaticalization pathways illustrate how cultural and linguistic diversity is reflected in the distinct ways languages externalize shared syntactic primitives, despite operating within a common underlying grammatical architecture.*

**KEYWORDS:** Grammaticalization, Complementizer, Serial Verb Construction, Cultural Diversity, Thai Hâi, Mandarin Gěi, Comparative Syntax, Structural Reanalysis.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Grammaticalization, the diachronic process by which lexical items acquire grammatical functions, has been studied in historical and typological linguistics (Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Heine & Kuteva, 2002). One of the most recurrent grammaticalization pathways involves verbs of transfer, such as *give*, which frequently extend from denoting physical transfer to marking more abstract relations, including benefactive, causative, and permissive constructions. Because these developments involve both semantic extension and syntactic reanalysis, *give*-verbs provide a productive testing ground for examining the relation between lexical and functional categories (Lord, 1993; Newman, 1996). In both Thai and Mandarin, the verb *give*, *hâi* in Thai and *gěi* in Mandarin, has undergone substantial grammaticalization. In Thai, *hâi* functions not only as a lexical verb of transfer but also as a benefactive marker and a causative predicate. In Mandarin, *gěi* extends beyond lexical transfer to introduce recipients or beneficiaries and, in certain contexts, permissive or causative meanings (Li & Thompson, 1981; Huang, Li & Li, 2009). These developments instantiate the well-attested cross-linguistic pathway *give* > benefactive/causative. English provides an instructive point of comparison. Although the verb *give* participates in the dative alternation (*He gave me a book / He gave a book to me*), it has not grammaticalized into a functional morpheme and remains lexical (Larson, 1988; Harley, 2002). Clause linkage and infinitival constructions are instead expressed through independent functional items such as *to* and *for*. This contrast raises a central question addressed in this paper: why does grammaticalization proceed further in some languages than in others, and what structural constraints shape its outcome?

While much prior work has approached grammaticalization from a functionalist perspective, emphasizing discourse frequency, pragmatic inference, and semantic bleaching (Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Bybee, Perkins, & Pagliuca, 1994), such accounts often underplay the role of syntactic structure. In contrast, generative approaches reinterpret grammaticalization as structural reanalysis, whereby lexical items are reanalyzed as overt realizations of functional heads already present in Universal Grammar (Roberts & Roussou, 2003). Complementing this view, von Stechow (1995) argues that grammaticalization supplies overt exponents for preexisting functional meanings in the semantic composition. Recent work in formal syntax and

grammaticalization has continued to refine the view that grammaticalization proceeds through structural reanalysis constrained by the clausal hierarchy, rather than through semantic bleaching alone (Roberts & Roussou, 2003; van Gelderen, 2013; Saito, 2021). Studies in the last five years have further emphasized the role of argument structure, restructuring environments, and the syntax of non-finite clauses in shaping grammaticalization outcomes, particularly in analytic and serializing languages (Wurmbrand & Lohninger, 2020; Wurmbrand, 2021). This body of research reinforces the claim that grammaticalization paths are neither uniform nor inevitable, but are filtered by language-specific syntactic resources governing complementation and event decomposition. The present study builds on these insights by showing that the divergent developments of *hâi* in Thai and *gěi* in Mandarin reflect differences in how each language exploits available functional projections, rather than differences in the lexical semantics of GIVE. Adopting these formal perspectives, this paper examines the grammaticalization of *hâi* and *gěi* in Thai and Mandarin, respectively, with reference to English. It argues that grammaticalization does not create new syntactic structure but makes overt functional categories that were previously covert, and that language-specific syntactic resources constrain how far such reanalysis can proceed. In addition to its theoretical contribution to grammaticalization and comparative syntax, the study supports cross-linguistic awareness in higher education and aligns with SDG 4 Quality Education by providing empirically grounded material for advanced language and linguistics curricula. Methodologically, this study is based on a combination of data drawn from the descriptive and theoretical literature on Thai and Mandarin, supplemented by constructed examples evaluated through native-speaker judgments. Native speakers of both languages, including linguistically trained consultants, were consulted to confirm acceptability contrasts and interpretive judgments.

## 2. FRAMEWORKS OF GRAMMATICALIZATION

Grammaticalization is defined as the process by which lexical items or constructions acquire grammatical or functional status over time (Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Heine & Kuteva, 2002). Canonical examples include the development of English modal auxiliaries such as *will* and *can*, which originated as full lexical verbs but gradually lost argument structure and came to function as auxiliaries

(Roberts, 1985; Warner, 1983). Such cases illustrate that grammaticalization involves coordinated changes in meaning and syntactic distribution.

### 2.1. *Functionalist Approaches*

Functionalist accounts emphasize principles such as unidirectionality and semantic bleaching. Unidirectionality holds that grammatical change typically proceeds from lexical to grammatical status, rather than in the reverse direction (Hopper & Traugott, 2003). Semantic bleaching refers to the loss or abstraction of lexical meaning as items become increasingly functional (Bybee, 1983). These changes are often modeled as clines or continua, both between content and function words and within functional categories (Lehmann, 1995; Traugott, 1994). A common assumption in this literature is that grammatical categories have gradient boundaries, allowing elements undergoing grammaticalization to display mixed or intermediate properties. While this perspective has been influential in identifying cross-linguistic pathways, it has been criticized for relying on notions such as “degree of abstraction” without explicit syntactic diagnostics (van Gelderen, 2004).

### 2.2. *Formalist Approaches*

Formalist approaches reject gradient category membership and analyze grammaticalization as structural reanalysis within a fixed syntactic architecture. Kroch (2001) models grammatical change as the outcome of grammar competition during acquisition, while Roberts and Roussou (2003) formalize grammaticalization as the reanalysis of lexical material into higher functional heads along the hierarchy of functional projections. On this view, grammaticalization does not introduce new projections but reuses existing ones. Von Stechow (1995) complements this syntactic account with a formal semantic perspective, arguing that grammaticalization provides overt realization for functional meanings already present in the compositional system. More recent work develops related ideas: Saito (2021) links grammaticalization to decategorization through the loss of categorizing heads, while Wu (2004) proposes a model of vertical grammaticalization in which lexical items activate higher functional projections in Chinese. Despite theoretical differences, these approaches converge on the view that grammaticalization enriches the overt functional inventory through reanalysis rather than semantic erosion alone.

More recent generative research has further clarified how grammaticalization interacts with decategorization, restructuring, and the distribution

of non-finite clauses (Saito, 2021). Rather than assuming a single unidirectional path from lexical verb to complementizer, current approaches emphasize micro-variation and verb-specific selectional properties, especially in languages that permit serialization or bare VP complementation (Wurmbrand & Lohninger, 2020; Wurmbrand, 2021). These developments support a view in which grammaticalization targets specific functional heads already licensed in the grammar, with the availability of such reanalysis constrained by independently motivated properties of clause structure. This perspective provides a theoretical backdrop for the present comparison of Thai and Mandarin, where superficially similar GIVE-based constructions diverge sharply once clause-embedding diagnostics are applied.

## 3. PATHWAYS OF GIVE-VERBS

Verbs of transfer, particularly *give*, are among the most productive sources of grammatical markers cross-linguistically (Lord, 1993; Newman, 1996). The pathway *give* > benefactive > causative/permissive is widely attested and reflects a natural extension from transfer to affectedness and causation (Heine & Kuteva, 2002). In Thai, *hâi* has developed beyond its lexical meaning to function as both a benefactive and a causative marker (Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom, 2005). In Mandarin, *gěi* extends from a lexical verb to a preposition-like element introducing beneficiaries and permissive or causative meanings (Li & Thompson, 1981; Huang, Li & Li, 2009). English again contrasts with both languages. Despite exhibiting argument-structure alternations such as the double-object construction, English *give* has not grammaticalized into a functional head and remains lexical (Larson, 1988; Harley, 2002). By examining the reanalysis of *hâi* and *gěi* in Thai and Mandarin, the paper shows that grammaticalization proceeds along a universal functional structure but is filtered by language-specific resources such as serialization, restructuring, and clause-embedding strategies. Against this background, Thai *hâi* and Mandarin *gěi* provide a revealing point of comparison. While both extend from lexical GIVE to benefactive and causative or permissive functions, they diverge in how far grammaticalization proceeds into the domain of clause linking and non-finite complementation.

The following section examines this divergence in detail, using syntactic diagnostics and a comparison with English to show how language-specific structural resources constrain grammaticalization outcomes.

#### 4. GRAMMATICALIZATION OF HÂI AND GĚI

The lexical items *gěi* in Mandarin and *hâi* in Thai occur in a range of syntactic positions and display strikingly similar functions across the two languages. The two languages, however, differ in their basic constituent order: in Thai, the direct object precedes the indirect object, while in Mandarin, the indirect object precedes the direct object.

##### (1) Canonical verbal use

###### (1a) Thai

*khǎo hâi nǎŋsǔm phǒm*  
3SG give book 1SG  
'He gave me a book.'

###### (1b) Mandarin

*Tā gěi wǒ shū*  
3SG give 1SG book  
'He gave me a book.'

##### (2) Causative / permissive use

###### (2a) Thai

*khǎo hâi phǒm chái rôt khǎawŋ khǎo*  
3SG give 1SG use car GEN 3SG  
'He permitted me to use his car.'

###### (2b) Mandarin

*Tā gěi wǒ yòng tā de chē*  
3SG give 1SG use 3SG GEN car  
'He permitted me to use his car.'

It is uncontroversial that *give* in (1a-b) and (2a-b) functions as a verb. In (2a-b), the meanings of *hâi* and *gěi*, though different from their canonical sense of physical transfer, are still verbal, representing a case of semantic broadening. Their English counterpart is reflected in the translation with the verb *permit*. Since these uses remain verbal, they are not instances of grammaticalization. Other uses of *hâi* in Thai and *gěi* in Mandarin are more controversial and open to competing analyses. In these non-canonical distributions, the verb *give* no longer functions as a lexical verb of transfer but serves to introduce a goal or beneficiary. We begin with their benefactive/goal use, as illustrated in (3a-c), where *give* appears either post-verbally in both Thai (3a) and Mandarin (3b), following the lexical predicate, or preverbally preceding it in Mandarin only (3c).

##### (3) Benefactive/Goal use

###### (3a) Thai

*khǎo sǒng nǎŋsǔm hâi phǒm*  
3SG send book give 1SG  
'He sent a book to/for me.'

###### (3b) Mandarin

*Tā sǒng shū gěi wǒ*  
3SG send book give 1SG  
'He sent me a book.'

###### (3c) Mandarin

*Tā gěi wǒ sǒng shū*  
3SG give 1SG send book  
'He sent me a book.' / 'He sent a book for me.'

The data in (3a-c) reveal systematic differences in the positional behavior of benefactive/goal *give* in Thai and Mandarin. In Thai, *hâi* in (3a) occurs post-verbally, following the lexical predicate, in a position that corresponds both to the canonical slot for benefactive/PP-like material and to the surface position of the second verb in serial-verb constructions. Although the Mandarin sentence in (3b) displays the same surface word order as the Thai sentence in (3a), the post-verbal placement of *gěi* in (3b) does not correspond to the canonical prepositional position in Mandarin. This positional asymmetry has motivated three competing analyses in the literature: (i) a prepositional analysis, which treats *hâi* and *gěi* as grammaticalized prepositions; (ii) a serial verb analysis, which analyzes them as lexical verbs participating in serial verb constructions (SVCs); and (iii) a hybrid analysis, which allows both verbal and functional uses depending on syntactic environment.

Turning first to Thai, the benefactive construction in (3a) is genuinely ambiguous because Thai is a serializing language in which many relational meanings are expressed through verb serialization rather than a delimited class of adpositions. On the one hand, *hâi* in (3a) can be analyzed as a benefactive/goal preposition introducing a recipient or beneficiary; on the other hand, it can be analyzed as the second verb in a serial verb construction of the form  $V_1$  - Theme -  $V_2$  - Recipient, a configuration that is canonical in Thai and widely attested for transfer predicates (Bisang, 1991; Enfield, 2003). Thai does not allow the Mandarin-style preverbal placement of benefactive *give* as a preposition-like element, as the language lacks a preverbal preposition slot; when *hâi* occurs in a position like *gěi* in (3c), it occupies the position of an ordinary verb 'give', patterned like other lexical verbs rather than as a benefactive preposition. As a result, the surface order in (3a) is compatible with both a serialized verbal structure and a post-verbal benefactive marker analysis, making structural ambiguity an expected outcome given the typological profile of Thai.

To evaluate this ambiguity, the following section applies syntactic diagnostics used to distinguish serial verb constructions from grammaticalized benefactive prepositions, including aspect marking and event interpretation. While *hâi* functions as a full lexical verb meaning 'give' in canonical verbal contexts and can independently host aspectual

markers (e.g., *khǎo hâi ηən phǒm lē□ew* ‘he has already given me money’), aspect marking on *hâi* is typically degraded in benefactive constructions such as *khǎo sǒng nǎηsǔu hâi phǒm*. In such cases, aspectual markers are interpreted as modifying the event as a whole rather than *hâi* itself, a pattern consistent with the claim of grammaticalization accounts in which verbal properties erode gradually rather than categorically (Bisang, 1991; Enfield, 2003). The interpretive status of *hâi* is not determined by its linear position. Rather, the availability of a verbal versus functional reading is sensitive to whether *hâi* licenses further predication. When *hâi* occurs in a position that coincides with the canonical locus of benefactive marking and is not followed by an additional verbal predicate, a non-eventive benefactive interpretation is preferred. When the same configuration is followed by a second predicate, *hâi* must introduce an event to license further predication, and a lexical-verbal interpretation is strongly favored. Therefore, the absence of an independent event is not a property of second-position *hâi* in Thai serial verb constructions. This is illustrated by the contrasts in (4a-c).

**(4) Serial verb vs. goal/benefactive preposition *hâi* in Thai**

(4a) *khǎo khǎai bâan hâi ηən phǒm kin khâao mûa-waan*  
3SG sell house give money 1SG eat rice yesterday  
‘He sold the house and gave me money to eat (yesterday).’

(4b) *khǎo khǎai bâan hâi ηən phǒm maa-lē□ew mûa-waan*  
3SG sell house give money 1SG come-PFV yesterday  
‘He sold the house and gave me the money back yesterday.’

(4c) *khǎo khǎai bâan hâi phǒm mûa-waan*  
3SG sell house give 1SG yesterday  
‘He sold the house to/for me yesterday.’

In (4a-b), *hâi* selects an overt theme (*ηən* ‘money’) and a recipient, and native-speaker judgments confirm that the temporal adverb *mûa-waan* ‘yesterday’ is interpreted as modifying the *hâi* predicate rather than the first verb *khǎai* ‘sell’. The availability of independent temporal anchoring, together with aspectual morphology in (4b), indicates that *hâi* in these cases functions as a lexical verb introducing an independent giving event within a serial verb construction. These data challenge analyses that treat second-position *hâi* uniformly as a grammaticalized benefactive/goal preposition. By contrast, the benefactive construction in (4c), which lacks an internal theme argument for *hâi*, behaves differently. Its default interpretation associates *mûa-waan* with the selling event, consistent with prior claims that benefactive *hâi* does not introduce an

independent event (Bisang, 1991; Enfield, 2003).

Taken together, these contrasts undermine both a strict prepositional analysis and approaches that deny verbhood to *hâi* in second-position serial verb constructions where it coincides with the preposition position. Instead, they support a refined hybrid analysis in which the eventivity associated with *hâi* is sensitive to argument structure and to the availability of further predication in the clause, reflecting underlying syntactic structure rather than being determined by linear position. This paper thus contributes new empirical evidence showing that the eventivity attributed to *hâi* in Thai constructions is construction-sensitive rather than position-sensitive, a distinction that has remained underexplored in previous work (Bisang, 1991; Enfield, 2003).

**4.1. Positional Constraints and Event Diagnostics Of GIVE**

Mandarin allows *gěi* to appear both post-verbally and preverbally, but these positions are not interpretively equivalent: the preverbal slot, exemplified in (3c) repeated as (5a) below, is the canonical position for main verbs and for verbal items that have grammaticalized into preposition-like functional heads, and in this configuration *gěi* precedes the lexical predicate, introduces a recipient without selecting its own internal theme, and lacks independent verbal morphology or event structure, motivating its analysis as a grammaticalized functional head rather than a lexical verb (Li & Thompson, 1981; Huang, Li & Li, 2009). By contrast, the postverbal occurrence of *gěi* in (3b) repeated here as (5b) occupies a position that is not canonical for prepositions in Mandarin and has therefore been taken to retain residual verbal properties or to participate in a serial-verb-like construction. For ease of comparison, (5c) repeats the Thai example from (3a): although the surface order in (5b) and (5c) is identical, the interpretive consequences differ across the two languages, since in Mandarin the preverbal position offers a structurally privileged site for the grammaticalization of *gěi* as a functional head, whereas in Thai the relevant postverbal slot is canonically used both for serialized verbs and for prepositions, giving rise to genuine structural ambiguity and providing the backdrop for the syntactic diagnostics developed in the following section.

**(5) Preverbal benefactive *gěi***

(5a) Mandarin  
*Tā gěi wǒ sòng shū*

3SG give 1SG send book

'He sent me a book.' / 'He sent a book for me.'

(5b) Mandarin

Tā sòng wǒ gěi shū

3SG send 1SG give book

'He sent me a book.' / 'He sent a book for me.'

(5c) Thai

khǎo sòng nǎn̄sǔu hâi phǒm

3SG send book give 1SG

'He sent a book to/for me.'

In (5a), *gěi* does not introduce an independent giving event. It cannot host aspectual marking, cannot be anchored independently, and does not license a theme argument. Temporal adverbs such as *zuótiān* 'yesterday' are interpreted as modifying the sending event rather than *gěi* itself. These properties motivate the widely accepted analysis of preverbal *gěi* as a grammaticalized functional head, often analyzed as a preposition rather than as a lexical verb (Li & Thompson, 1981; Huang, Li & Li, 2009). In underlying terms, (5a) and (5c) are parallel: despite their different surface orders, both instantiate a configuration in which a GIVE-form (*gěi* in Mandarin, *hâi* in Thai) occupies the canonical benefactive/prepositional slot and introduces a recipient/goal argument, warranting a unified comparative analysis. In Mandarin (5a), *gěi* surfaces preverbally as a functional head introducing the recipient or goal, while in Thai (5c), *hâi* surfaces post-verbally after the VP, even though in both languages the GIVE-form functions as a benefactive/goal marker rather than as a main lexical verb.

At the same time, both Mandarin *gěi* and Thai *hâi* can also appear as the first predicate in more complex, serial-like configurations where the GIVE-event and a following purpose or directive event are construed as a single, integrated episode. For some Mandarin speakers, sentences such as *Tā gěi wǒ qián ràng/yào wǒ qù mǎi cài* 'He gave me money to go buy food to eat' are fully natural without a prosodic break after *qián*, and are interpreted as describing one unified event of 'giving money for the purpose of going to buy food', making them surface-comparable to Thai *khǎo hâi nǎn̄sǔu phǒm pay sɯ̌ khâaw kin* 'He gave me money to go buy food to eat'. From this perspective, it is not surprising that GIVE can occur as the first verb in SVC in both languages: transfer semantics ('cause to have') supports benefactive, causative, and purpose readings. Instances where *gěi* and *hâi* serve as the initial predicate in such configurations have received little explicit attention, and when they are discussed they are often treated as involving two separate clauses, with a null subject in the second clause, rather than as a single serial-verb structure; the

present data suggest that, at least for some speakers, a monoclausal, SVC-like analysis is also available. Nevertheless, whether a biclausal or an SVC approach is adopted, both converge on the view that the relevant GIVE-form is a lexical verb, rather than a purely grammaticalized functional head. A more interesting and controversial case of GIVE-based grammaticalization arises when uses of *gěi* and *hâi* extend beyond the purely benefactive/prepositional patterns in (5a-c). While the readings of (5a-b) in Mandarin and (5c) in Thai are restricted to a non-eventive benefactive interpretation, a change in argument structure, the addition of a second predicate, forces an eventive reading in which the GIVE-form introduces a full-fledged giving event, as in (6a-b) below. As the next section shows, other configurations go further and have been analyzed as instances where *gěi* and *hâi* function as complementizers or infinitival (Inflo) heads, representing a more advanced stage of GIVE-based grammaticalization.

(6a) Mandarin

Tā sòng shū gěi wǒ kàn.

3SG send 1SG give book read

'He sent me a book.' / 'He sent a book for me to read.'

(6b) Thai

khǎo sòng nǎn̄sǔu hâi phǒm àan.

3SG send book give 1SG read

'He sent a book to/for me to read.'

In (6a-b), *gěi* and *hâi* obligatorily function as lexical verbs in a serial-verb construction. The presence of the second predicate 'read' forces an eventive interpretation in which *gěi* and *hâi* introduce a genuine giving/transfer event, and the following predicate denotes a subsequent, purpose-related event. This is a familiar pattern in SVCs in both languages, where the first and second verbs can denote two distinct but tightly linked subevents and, as such, can each be modified by event-related adverbs. This pattern also clarifies why the Thai facts in (4a-c), where second-position *hâi* may shift toward a verbal interpretation in the presence of additional predication without changing its surface position, do have a counterpart in Mandarin. In both languages, the availability of an eventive reading for GIVE in a second position correlates with argument structure and selectional properties, not merely with linear order or serialization. The following section turns to a different extension of GIVE, namely complementizer and infinitival uses, where *hâi* (and, more controversially, *gěi*) has been analyzed as a clause-embedding functional head rather than as a lexical verb. More importantly, the SVC-like patterns

in (6a–b) are structurally close to the environments that have motivated complementizer or Inflo analyses of *gěi* and *hâi* in the literature, since in both cases a GIVE-form precedes a purpose- or directive-like predicate within a single clause. This makes them a useful baseline: they show what a clearly eventive lexical use of GIVE with a following predicate looks like, against which putative clause-embedding uses can be compared. The next section builds on this baseline to examine configurations where *hâi* and *gěi* have been argued to function as complementizers or infinitival heads, and argues that only a proper subset of these cases instantiate non-lexical, clause-embedding GIVE.

#### 4.2. Complementizer And Infinitival Uses of Give

In recent discussions of Mandarin clause structure, there has been renewed attention to the distinction between true clause-embedding functional heads and elements that participate in serial-verb or purposive constructions (Huang, Li & Simpson, 2022). Studies published in the last few years increasingly caution against overextending complementizer analyses to GIVE-based and coverbal constructions, emphasizing instead the role of event integration, purposive modification, and the absence of independent tense or finiteness marking (Wurmbbrand, 2021). Against this backdrop, earlier proposals that analyze *gěi* as a complementizer merit re-examination using more stringent syntactic diagnostics. The following discussion adopts this perspective and argues that purported complementizer uses of *gěi* can be accounted for without positing grammaticalization into the C-domain.

Thai *hâi* is well known to introduce embedded clauses in contexts where no transfer, benefactive, or causative meaning is involved, and in such cases, it cannot be analyzed as a lexical verb or as licensing its own arguments. Instead, it functions as a clause-embedding marker, comparable to a complementizer ‘for’ or an infinitival marker ‘to’.

- (7a) *khǎo sàŋ hâi nák-rian klàp bâan*  
3SG order give student return home  
‘He ordered the students to go home.’
- (7b) *khǎo sàŋ nák-rian hâi klàp bâan*  
3SG order student give return home  
‘He ordered the students to go home.’
- (7c) *khǎo sàŋ nák-rian klàp bâan*  
3SG order student return home  
‘He ordered the students to go home.’
- (8a) *khǎo yàak hâi nák-rian klàp bâan*  
3SG want give student return home

- ‘He wants the students to go home.’
- (8b) *\*khǎo yàak nák-rian hâi klàp bâan*  
3SG want student give return home  
Intended: ‘He wants the students to go home.’
- (8c) *?khǎo yàak nák-rian klàp bâan*  
3SG want student return home  
‘He wants the students to go home.’

The contrasts in (7) – (8) show that a complementizer-like *hâi* is sensitive to the lexical and syntactic properties of the selecting predicate. With directive predicates such as *sàŋ* ‘order’, all three patterns in (7a – c) are acceptable: *hâi* may either precede the embedded subject or follow it, or be absent altogether, indicating both that the embedded subject may raise into the matrix domain and that the clause can be realized with or without an overt clause-linking head. This flexibility is characteristic of restructuring environments and suggests that *sàŋ* can select a functional projection headed by *hâi* while also permitting complementizer drop.

By contrast, with desiderative predicates such as *yàak* ‘want’, the distribution is more restricted: the configuration in which *hâi* precedes the embedded subject, as in (8a), is well formed, whereas *yàak* resists the “raised-subject” order in (8b) and only allows a variant without overt *hâi*, as in (8c). This pattern shows that *hâi*, as a complementizer/Inflo head, is itself subject to arbitrary lexical selection: some predicates, such as *sàŋ* and *tâykaan* ‘want/require’, freely allow or even prefer an overt *hâi*, while others, such as *yàak*, impose tighter restrictions on the position and optionality of the complementizer. In other words, even once *hâi* has grammaticalized into a functional head, its realization is partly determined by verb-specific selectional properties.

Across the patterns in (7) – (8), *hâi* does not denote giving, nor does it introduce a beneficiary or select a theme argument. Moreover, it cannot host aspectual marking, cannot be independently modified by temporal adverbs, and does not contribute to event structure. Instead, it consistently serves to link the matrix predicate to a non-finite embedded clause, whose subject (*nák-rian*) is interpreted as the subject of the lower predicate (*klàp bâan*), and in cases like (7c) and (8c), this clause-linking relation is preserved even when *hâi* is unpronounced. These properties support an analysis of *hâi* as a grammaticalized functional head, either a C-head or a non-finite T/Inflo head, rather than as a verb in a serial verb construction (Bisang, 1991; Jenks, 2011). From a generative perspective, *hâi* in these clause-linking constructions occupies a fixed position in the clausal structure, and the fact that *hâi* itself remains positionally stable while the embedded subject can

vary, together with verb-specific constraints on its overt realization, further reinforces its status as a functional element. The absence of event structure and argument selection distinguishes complementizer *hâi* from both prepositional *hâi* and verbal *hâi*, confirming that this use represents a genuine case of syntactic grammaticalization rather than mere semantic extension.

In light of this clear grammaticalization profile for Thai *hâi*, proposals that Mandarin *gěi* in purposive constructions has similarly become a complementizer are far less straightforward. In their analysis of purposive *gěi* constructions, Ting and Chang (2004) propose that *gěi* functions as a complementizer analogous to English for in for-to infinitives, advancing four key arguments.

**First, they note that temporal adverbs such as *míngtiān* ‘tomorrow’ cannot modify *gěi* directly, as in (9a), which they take to show that *gěi* is not a matrix predicate but a clause-introducing head:**

(9a) \*Wǒ xiǎng le hěn duō fāngfǎ míngtiān gěi tā jiějué nántí

1SG think PFV many ways tomorrow give 3SG solve problem

Intended: ‘I have thought of many ways in order to give her a solution to the problem tomorrow.’ In their view, the unacceptability of (9a) follows if *gěi* in purposive constructions is a clause-introducing a functional head that cannot be directly modified by temporal adverbs.

**However, similar degradation arises in independently recognized serial-verb contexts where no complementizer status is at stake, as in (9b):**

(9b) ?Tā jìn wū míngtiān zuò xià

3SG enter room tomorrow sit down

Intended: ‘He will enter the room and sit down tomorrow.’

The parallel between (9a) and (9b) suggests that the relevant constraint targets the interruption of a tightly integrated event chain by a temporal adverb, rather than a category-specific property of *gěi*. Thus, the adverb-placement facts in (9a) are fully compatible with an analysis on which *gěi* remains a verbal/prepositional element in a serial-verb configuration and, by themselves, do not motivate reclassifying *gěi* as a complementizer.

Second, they claim that a *gěi* NP sequence cannot stand alone as a matrix PP, but must be followed by a verb, and thus is only licensed as part of an embedded clause.

**This is illustrated by their contrast in (10):**

(10a) Wǒ chàng yì shǒu gē gěi tā tīng.

1SG sing one CL song give 3SG listen

‘I sang a song for him (to listen to).’

(10b) \*\*Wǒ chàng yì shǒu gē gěi tā.

1SG sing one CL song give 3SG

Intended: ‘I sang a song for him.’

On the basis of (10b), Ting and Chang argue that *gěi* NP in the purposive construction cannot be integrated as a matrix PP and therefore must be analyzed as part of an embedded clause headed by complementizer *gěi*. However, native-speaker judgments indicate that the pattern in (10b) is, in fact, acceptable for many speakers, as illustrated by the Mandarin example in (11a) and the Thai counterpart in (11b).

(11a) Wǒ chàng yì shǒu gē gěi tā.

1SG sing one CL song give 3SG

‘I sang a song for him.’

(11b) phǒm rǎo phleer hâi khǎo

1SG sing song give 3SG

‘I sang a song for him.’

**Third, they argue, based on examples such as (12a), that the NP following *gěi* behaves as an embedded subject, since it can bind *zìjǐ* (‘self’) within the purpose clause:**

(12a) Zhāngsān shèjì le yí ge fāngshì gěi tāmen jiǎng zìjǐ/j de gùshì.

Zhangsan design PFV one CL method give they tell self DE story

‘Zhangsan designed a way for them to tell self’s childhood stories.’

In (12b), a reading in which *zìjǐ* refers back to the matrix subject *Zhāngsān* is readily available, although the intervening *gěi tāmen* is treated as an embedded clause and would constitute a barrier for binding, showing that the mere possibility of *zìjǐ* binding from the *gěi*-NP does not uniquely diagnose embedded subjecthood and is compatible with a discourse-anaphoric analysis of *zìjǐ* instead. More generally, once logophoric and discourse-based accounts of *zìjǐ* are taken into consideration, the facts in (12a–b) are compatible with treating *gěi* NP as a prepositional object in a purpose clause, and do not compel a complementizer analysis. Even under a more traditional binding-theoretic view, *gěi* in (12b) can equally well be analyzed as a lexical verb in a serial-verb construction, with *tāmen* as its object; in that case, the availability of *zìjǐ* is no more problematic than binding into the object domain of an ordinary verb and again provides no decisive evidence for reclassifying *gěi* as a functional C-head.

**Fourth, they observe that two post-verbal *gěi*-goal phrases are ungrammatical, as in (13a), whereas a *gěi*-goal followed by a *gěi* NP**

V sequence is marginally acceptable, as in (13b), and interpret this contrast as evidence that the second *gěi* must be a complementizer introducing a purpose clause:

(13a) \*\*Wǒ sòng le yì běn shū gěi Lǐsì gěi tā xiǎohái.  
1SG give PFV one CL book give Lisi give 3SG  
child

Intended: 'I gave a book to Lisi for his child.'

(13b) (?)Wǒ sòng le yì běn shū gěi Lǐsì gěi tā xiǎohái kàn.  
1SG give PFV one CL book give Lisi give 3SG  
child read

'I gave a book to Lisi for his child to read.' Yet these facts also follow straightforwardly from general constraints on serial-verb constructions and event structure, without positing a distinct complementizer *gěi*. If the second *gěi* in (13b) is analyzed as ordinary lexical 'give' in a serial verb chain, the deviance of (13a) simply reflects the requirement that such chains culminate in a final lexical predicate contributing the main event (here, *kàn* 'read'), which is missing in (13a). The improvement in (13b) thus arises once the event is completed by *kàn*, not because the second *gěi* has changed category.

**Comparable restrictions are found in other SVC languages, including Thai, which disallows two occurrences of the verb 'give' or two postverbal *hâi*-goal phrases without a final lexical predicate reinforcing an event-structural and semantic restriction rather than a purely categorial explanation:**

(14a) ?khǎo sòng còtmǎay hâi nák rian hâi phò mēe khǒng phúakkhǎo  
3SG send letter give student give parent of  
3PL

'He sent a letter to the students for their parents.'

(14b) \*khǎo tham aahǎan hâi nák rian hâi phò mēe khǒng phúakkhǎo  
3SG make food give student give parent of  
3PL

The marginality of (14a) and the clear unacceptability of (14b) show that Thai resists stacked *hâi*-phrases without an additional lexical predicate that can anchor the final event, paralleling the Mandarin pattern in (13a-b) and supporting an event-structural rather than a complementizer-based account.

While *gěi* clearly participates in benefactive and goal-marking constructions, as well as serving as the second predicate in serial-verb constructions, its ability to function as a general clause-embedding marker is limited. Although some authors propose a

general Inflo → C grammaticalization path (Roberts & Roussou, 2003; van Gelderen, 2004), the Thai facts suggest that any such trajectory cannot be understood as a uniform, deterministic sequence. In particular, the contrast between near-synonymous predicates like *yàak* 'want' and *tǎnkaan* 'want/require' indicates that the distribution of grammaticalized *hâi* is lexically conditioned: *tǎnkaan* allows *hâi* in both a post-subject (Inflo-like) and a pre-subject (C-like) position, whereas *yàak* only admits *hâi* in the complementizer-like position. Rather than reflecting a single, completed shift from Inflo to C, this pattern points to a system in which *hâi* can realize multiple functional heads, with access to those positions regulated by verb-specific selectional properties. Mandarin, in particular, offers no clear evidence that *gěi* has grammaticalized into an infinitival (Inflo) head or a complementizer, despite proposals that *gěi* functions as a complementizer in purposive clauses (e.g. Ting & Chang, 2004; Her, 2006). Under the present analysis, these so-called complementizer uses are better treated as instances of a lexical verb in a serial-verb construction or as part of related coverb configurations, rather than as an independent C-head. In Mandarin, unlike Thai, verbs such as *mìnglìng* 'order', *yào* 'want', *ràng* 'let', and *jiào* 'tell' select either bare VP complements, or causative structures headed by lexical predicates (typically *ràng* and *jiào*), and suggests that Mandarin directive and desiderative predicates do not employ a GIVE-based complementizer or infinitival head comparable to Thai *hâi*, reinforcing the view that *gěi* 'give' in Mandarin remains verbal/coverbal rather than a grammaticalized C-element. This contrast is evident in (15).

**In Mandarin, inserting *gěi* as a putative complementizer renders the clause ill-formed, whereas bare VP complementation is fully grammatical:**

(15a) \*Tā mìnglìng gěi xuéshēng qián chī fàn  
3SG order give student money eat rice  
Intended: 'He ordered the students (by giving them money) to eat.'

(15b) Tā mìnglìng xuéshēng chī fàn  
3SG order student eat rice  
'He ordered the students to eat.'

The unacceptability of (15a) contrasts with Thai, where a formally similar GIVE-form (*hâi*) freely introduces embedded directives, and thus supports the claim that only Thai – not Mandarin – has grammaticalized 'give' into a directive complementizer/Inflo element. Sentence (15a) is ungrammatical under the intended complementizer reading: the insertion of *gěi* cannot be interpreted as

introducing an embedded clause, but instead violates Mandarin argument-structural constraints on directive predicates, whereas (15b) shows that Mandarin expresses directive complementation via bare VP embedding, a strategy independently well-documented in descriptive and generative work on Mandarin complementation (Li & Thompson, 1981; Huang et al., 1999; Huang, Li & Li, 2009).

#### 4.3. Cross-Linguistic Comparison: Thai, Mandarin, And English

The preceding sections have shown that Thai *hâi* and Mandarin *gěi* exhibit both convergent and divergent behaviors in benefactive and goal constructions. From a comparative generative perspective, these patterns can be understood as different surface realizations of a shared underlying syntactic architecture provided by Universal Grammar. Across Thai, Mandarin, and English, benefactive relations systematically involve the introduction of an additional participant, typically a recipient or beneficiary, into the event structure. In generative terms, this relation has been widely analyzed as being encoded by an applicative or argument-introducing functional projection within the verbal domain (Marantz, 1993; Pytkäinen, 2008). English provides a useful point of comparison because it distinguishes verbal, prepositional, and clausal strategies for encoding argument relations. In sentences such as *John gave Mary a book* and *John sent a book to Mary*, the recipient is introduced either directly by the verb *give* or by the preposition *to*, both of which are licensed by the underlying argument structure of the predicate (Larson, 1988). In clausal complementation, however, English employs a distinct set of functional elements, most notably the infinitival marker *to* and the complementizer *for* (*John ordered Mary to leave*; *For Mary to leave would be unusual*). English does not permit category ambiguity across these domains: lexical verbs, prepositions, infinitival markers, and complementizers occupy distinct syntactic positions and display differentiated morphosyntactic behavior. Mandarin patterns more closely with English in this respect. Preverbal *gěi* is synchronically analyzed as a grammaticalized functional element, often treated as a coverb or applicative head, rather than as a lexical verb (Li & Thompson, 1981; Huang, Li, & Li, 2009; Paul, 2015). Like English *to/for*, Mandarin complement and clause-linking constructions are expressed through elements other than *gěi*, including bare VP complementation and causative predicates such as *ràng* and *jiào*. As a result, Mandarin does not

extend *gěi* into the domain of complementizers or infinitival markers, maintaining a clear structural separation between benefactive marking and clause embedding. Thai, by contrast, occupies an intermediate yet distinctive position. While the same underlying applicative structure can be assumed for benefactive constructions, Thai allows *hâi* to surface in a position compatible with both serialized verbal structures and grammaticalized benefactive marking. This gives rise to genuine structural underspecification: the same surface configuration may support either a verbal or a functional interpretation, with disambiguation driven by argument structure, the availability of further predication, and discourse context. Thai extends this flexibility beyond the verbal domain. In addition to benefactive uses, *hâi* has grammaticalized into a clause-linking element introducing non-finite embedded predicates, functioning as a complementizer or infinitival marker comparable to English *to* or *for*. In such constructions, *hâi* no longer denotes transfer, does not introduce a beneficiary, and does not license an independent event, but instead serves to mediate control and restructuring relations between a matrix predicate and an embedded clause.

From a generative standpoint, these cross-linguistic differences do not reflect different grammars, but rather different ways in which languages externalize a shared set of syntactic primitives. The availability of applicative structure, event decomposition, and argument-introducing functional heads can be assumed to be universal (Chomsky, 1995; Borer, 2005; Pytkäinen, 2008). What varies across Thai, Mandarin, and English is how far a given lexical source, here the verb *give*, is reanalyzed upward into the clausal structure. Thai permits *hâi* to grammaticalize into both applicative and clause-embedding heads, English restricts *give* to the lexical domain while employing independent functional markers for infinitival and complementizer functions, and Mandarin confines *gěi* to the verbal and applicative domain. The comparative evidence thus supports an approach in which grammaticalization pathways are constrained not only by semantic plausibility, but by language-specific structural resources governing serialization, complementation, and functional projection, all within a common underlying syntax.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Beyond its core theoretical contribution, the present study also bears implications for translation studies and language education in multilingual and

cross-cultural contexts. Fine-grained cross-linguistic analyses of GIVE-verbs highlight how formally similar constructions may encode distinct syntactic relations across languages, a fact that is directly relevant to translation, where meaning is increasingly understood as a dialogic negotiation among authors, translators, readers, and institutions rather than a one-way transfer (Wang & Hemchua, 2024). From an educational perspective, such analyses can inform pedagogy in Thai, Mandarin, and English by fostering learners' awareness of structural and functional variation across languages. In this sense, the study aligns with the broader objectives of SDG 4 (Quality Education) by supporting the development of intercultural and cross-linguistic competence in global, sustainability-oriented higher education. This orientation is consistent with recent work emphasizing digitally mediated, cross-cultural education and community-based teacher development as key avenues for

enhancing intercultural teaching competence (Ke & Hemchua, 2023; Hu & Hemchua, 2023). Dialogically oriented models of foreign language education likewise underscore the role of intersubjective, multi-voiced classroom interaction in cultivating learners' linguistic and cultural awareness (Tian, Hemchua & Wang, 2023).

In conclusion, the Thai-Mandarin contrast examined in this study shows that grammaticalization pathways are constrained by syntactic architecture rather than driven by semantic potential alone. While both languages extend GIVE into benefactive and goal-marking functions, only Thai permits further reanalysis of *hâi* into a clause-linking functional head, whereas Mandarin *gěi* remains confined to the verbal and applicative domain. This contrast provides clear support for a formal view of grammaticalization as structural reanalysis along a universal clausal spine, filtered by language-specific syntactic resources.

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