



Significance as a lens: Understanding the Mandarin *ba* construction through discourse adjacent alternation



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Abstract

Given alternative grammatical options, how do native speakers make the choice in a given communicative context? Drawing data from 300 videotaped conversations (100 h; one-million words), this study is the first to use a discourse adjacent alternation method to investigate how real-life speakers in a single conversation use alternative grammatical constructions to describe the same event. This study proposes the concept of LENS as a new aspect of linguistic construal. Lens refers to speakers' subjective evaluation of reality, especially their attitudes toward an event. This study finds that SIGNIFICANCE is a lens that evaluates an event as being highly consequential, challenging, or important. The elusive *ba*-construction in Mandarin is a linguistic device for the construe of significance: The *ba*-construction prototypically marks a transitive event as a significant consequence, contribution, or action, which is highly consequential, highly challenging, or highly important. The findings raise questions as to what linguistic devices are used in other languages to construe significance and what devices are used to construe other lenses in Mandarin and in other languages. This study reveals an association of linguistic markedness with discourse-level choices among paradigmatic oppositions in social interaction and suggests that syntactic markedness and semantic complexity correlate with discourse significance. The findings shed light on the pragmatic factors in linguistic choice-making during social interaction.

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1. Introduction

This study examines speakers' subjective aspects in linguistic choice-making at the discourse level. I ask the question of how a speaker comes to choose a particular grammar construction, in this case, the Mandarin *ba*-construction, out of all the grammatical choices s/he has available. I then use a dataset of 300 videotaped natural conversations and the discourse adjacent alternation method that I develop in this paper to investigate the alternative choices speakers in a single conversation make to describe the same event. I wish to propose the concept of LENS as an aspect of linguistic construal, which refers to speakers' subjective evaluation of reality, especially their attitudes toward an event. I will show that SIGNIFICANCE is a lens that evaluates an event as being highly consequential, challenging, or important. I will discuss how the *ba*-construction in Mandarin is a linguistic device for the construe of significance of transitive events, i.e., the function of the *ba*-construction to present a transitive event as being highly consequential, challenging, or important. I will also address the theoretical implications.

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1.1. Research question

There are alternative ways to describe the same event. “Speaking thus always implies a choice” (Verhagen, 2007). A major event in human language is the transitive event, in which an agent performs some action that affects an entity. To describe the event of a boy breaking a window, for example, a Mandarin speaker has at least eight grammatical options, including the *bei*-passive construction, the unmarked passive construction, the *rang*-construction, and the *ba*-construction¹ – “arguably the most famous” yet “poorly understood” grammatical construction (Jing-Schmidt and Tao, 2009). Thus the Alternative Puzzle: Given alternative grammatical options, how do native speakers make the choice in a given communicative context? This study uses large-scale Mandarin conversational data and takes a discourse approach to address a specific question concerning the Alternative Puzzle: Why does a speaker need to use a *ba*-construction while the use of other constructions is also grammatical?

The *ba*-construction refers to clauses or sentences such as (1), where the so-called preposition *ba* is used to mark the patient (*chuang* ‘window’) in a preverbal position:

- (1) 他 把 窗 打 破 了。
 ta ba chuang da po le
 3SG BA window hit break (COMP) PFV
 ‘He hit and broke the window.’

There are no equivalents of *ba* in English. The English sentence *He hit and broke the window* can be translated to either a *ba* sentence (1) or a non-*ba* sentence (2).

- (2) 他 打 破 了 窗。
 ta da po le chuang
 3SG hit break (COMP) PFV window

In a *bei*-passive construction (3), the patient is in a preverbal position with a lexical marking of passiveness *bei*.

- (3) 窗 被 他 打 破 了。
 chuang bei ta da po le
 window BEI 3SG hit break (COMP) PFV
 ‘The window was hit and broken by him.’

In an unmarked passive construction (4), the patient is in a preverbal position without any lexical marking of passiveness.

- (4) 窗 打 破 了。
 chuang da po le
 window hit break (COMP) PFV
 ‘The window (was) hit and broken.’

In a *rang*-construction (5), the patient is in a preverbal position with a lexical marking *rang* indicating passiveness, causation, or permission.

- (5) 窗 让 他 打 破 了。
 chuang rang ta da po le
 window RANG 3SG hit break (COMP) PFV
 ‘The window was hit and broken by him.’

There is an extremely extensive literature on the *ba*-construction and the other constructions. Studies on this kind of constructions constitute the core of the research on Chinese grammar, which often manifests as special constructions. Despite many pioneering findings in the literature, previous studies, which focus on how these constructions are used individually, usually cannot answer questions such as the Alternative Puzzle.

Instead of looking at constructions individually, this study turns to real-life conversations in which speakers use alternative constructions to describe the same event.

¹ There are different subtypes of the *ba*-construction. The use of the singular form is mainly for expository purposes.

1.2. Review of relevant research

This study primarily deals with linguistic choice-making issues pertaining to the choice of the *ba*-construction. The idea that grammatical constructions are options in a system is central in linguistics. For example, Systemic Functional Linguistics maintains that every grammatical structure involves a choice from a set of options made on many scales (Halliday, [1969]2003: 183, 2013: 19). Li (2007: 200–206) analyzes the *ba*-construction as a choice of the ‘operative’ option and explains the difference between the *ba*-construction and the *bei*-passive construction in terms of information flow. Linguistic choice-making is a complex issue. This study attempts to provide further insights into speakers’ subjective aspects in linguistic choice-making.

To tackle this problem, it is crucial to understand that speakers simultaneously take up stances as they use certain linguistic resources (e.g., Du Bois, 2007; Goodwin, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2012; Iwasaki and Yap, 2015; Su, 2016). Certain “facts” can be constructed through the use of certain grammatical recourses (Duranti, 1990). The systematic usage of different grammatical constructions encodes different points of view (Stubbs, 1996: 130). For example, an environmentalist text that explicitly orients to the responsibility for environmental problems and solutions may attribute both events and knowledge more frequently to their agents (Stubbs, 1996). In a word, reality is mediated through language (e.g., Brummett, 1976; Ellis, 1982; Ellis and Hamilton, 1985; Hart, 1982; Stubbs, 1996: 128).

How languages encode reality – the issue of construal – is fundamental in Cognitive Linguistics. “Construal is our multifaceted capacity to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways” (Langacker, 2007). Langacker (1987: 487–488) defines the construal relationship as “the relationship between a speaker (or hearer) and a situation that he conceptualizes and portrays, involving focal adjustments and imagery.” Langacker (2007) proposes a classification of construal: **(1) Specificity**: degrees of precision and detail (e.g., *do* → *act* → *move* → *run* → *lope*); **(2) Prominence**: (a) profile and base (e.g., *iris* and *pupil* profile different portions of the eye); (b) trajectory and landmark (e.g., the semantic contrast between *before* and *after* resides in whether the later event is invoked as a landmark for purposes of situating the earlier one, or as a trajectory that is being situated); **(3) Perspective**: (a) vantage point (e.g., *Come up into the attic* and *Go up into the attic* presuppose different speaker locations); (b) subjective or objective: whether the entity functions as a subject or object of conception (e.g., pronouns like *I* and *you*); (c) scope (e.g., a central domain for *next year* is the conception of one year following another, in an endless sequence); **(4) Dynamicity**: how a conceptualization develops through processing time. (e.g., *She argued about religion with her dentist* and *She argued with her dentist about religion* reflect the different orders in the event conception.) There are other similar classifications (e.g., Talmy, 2000: 40–84; Croft and Cruse, 2004: 43–46), with the Perspective category being the one that most proposals agree upon (Verhagen, 2007). What the current study adds to this body of research is a new aspect of construal: **Lens**.

Turning now to the previous studies on the *ba*-construction, it is often deemed the “most well-known construction in Chinese linguistics” (Sun, 2015: 429) and “arguably the most famous grammatical construction in linguistics. Equally famous is the fact that it is one of the most poorly understood linguistic phenomena” (Jing-Schmidt and Tao, 2009). Numerous studies have been dedicated to studying the function of this construction (e.g., Thompson, 1973; Li and Thompson, 1981; Sun, 1996; Tao and Zhang, 2000; Zhang, 2000; Jing-Schmidt, 2005; Jing-Schmidt and Tao, 2009; see reviews in Jing-Schmidt, 2005 and Su, 2011). There are over twenty accounts on the prototypical function of the *ba*-construction (Su, 2011). The most influential one is **disposal** – “how a person is handled, manipulated, or dealt with; how something is disposed of; or how an affair is conducted” (Wang, [1943]1985, translated by Li (1974)). Shen (2002) insightfully extends this account to “subjective disposal”: “signify the speaker’s subjective establishment of a disposal relationship between two participants of an event.” (Shen, 2002, translated by Jing-Schmidt and Tao, 2009). Shen (2002) should be applauded for acknowledging the subjectivity of the *ba*-construction. However, according to Li and Thompson (1981), disposal is not the unique function of *ba*: “The *bei*-construction also expresses disposal in the same manner as the *ba*-construction does” (p. 501). Jing-Schmidt (2005: 65–66) also makes a valid point that because of the flexible capacity of the morpheme *ba* to hold both OV and SV sequences, the function of *ba* cannot be anything (such as disposal) that marks only syntactic relationship between the individual constituents.

Jing-Schmidt (2005: 66) insightfully points out that “in terms of word order, the *ba*-construction not only constitutes markedness, it also exhibits diversity. . . . The peculiar capacity for structural diversity that allows the *ba*-construction to subsume both sequences OV and SV under one linguistic construction requires that the meaning of the *ba*-construction be sought at a level of linguistic organization above the clause. That is the level of discourse pragmatics.” This position prompted me to think about the connection between structural markedness and functional markedness of the *ba*-construction. As Sun and Givón (1985) find, Mandarin is primarily a typical VO language, with OV appearing at the level of 10% or lower in the written and spoken data they examined. The functional distribution of OV in Mandarin suggests that it is a marked, emphatic, contrastive discourse device (Light, 1979; Sun and Givón, 1985). In contrast to its unmarked SVO counterpart, the peculiar syntactic markedness of the *ba*-construction to take both OV and SV sequences “requires functional motivations and has functional consequences” (Jing-Schmidt, 2005: 66). Jing-Schmidt (2005) finds that the *ba*-construction as a marked construction serves a special pragmatic function (p. 291); in other words, there is a correlation

between the structural markedness of the *ba*-construction and the discourse dramaticity it signals. Similarly, as will be shown in the current study, there is a straightforward connection between its structural markedness and the discourse significance it signals in the conversation data the current study examines. This point will be discussed in Section 4.

More generally, markedness theory is at the core of the research on paradigmatic oppositions in linguistics (for phonological markedness, see, e.g., [Greenberg, 1966](#); [Battistella, 1990](#); for semantic and grammatical markedness, see, e.g., [Greenberg, 1966](#); [Clark and Clark, 1978](#); [Lazard, 1989](#); for markedness pertaining to the interface of syntax and discourse, see, e.g., [Givón, 1990](#); [Couper-Kuhlen, 1989](#); [Harris, 1989](#)). Regarding semantic and grammatical markedness, the literature (the reader is referred to [Andersen, 1989](#) for a comprehensive review on markedness) has generated fruitful findings on language universals, especially with regard to grammatical categories and word order, language processing, clause types and structures, etc. For example, [Greenberg \(1966\)](#) establishes frequency as the determining factor of markedness in grammar. [Givón \(1990\)](#) further finds that markedness is related to not only relative structural complexity and frequency but also cognitive complexity, in terms of “attention, mental effort or processing time” (p. 947). [Clark and Clark \(1978\)](#) contend that language universals reflect abstract thought processes that favor certain perceptual experiences. [Lazard \(1989\)](#) studies the marked and unmarked distinctions in ergative and accusative languages and finds that the marked construction is sometimes the more transitive and sometimes the less transitive ones. In another word, transitivity does not correlate with markedness ([Lazard, 1989: 325](#)). [Harris \(1989: 333\)](#) rightly suggests that “the concept of markedness may have a significant role to play at more than one linguistic level as we seek to account for the use of one particular structure rather than another in a given context.” [Couper-Kuhlen \(1989\)](#) investigates the markedness of a kind of temporal clauses (such as ... *when/before*...) which occurs exclusively in narration and finds that discourse constructions such as narrative temporal clauses belie the assumption of the main clause/non-main clause distinction. [Prideaux and Hogan \(1993\)](#) also apply discourse analysis to narrative data and find that marked structures are found more often than unmarked ones at discourse unit boundaries. [Prideaux and Hogan](#) conclude that marked structures can be used to manage discourse flow. Using spontaneous conversational data, what the current study adds to this body of research is the finding on the association of linguistic markedness with discourse-level choices in social interaction.

Because I am using a discourse approach to study the *ba*-construction, I would like to review an important discourse account of the *ba*-construction – **high transitivity** (e.g., [Thompson, 1973](#); [Sun, 1995](#); [Hopper and Thompson, 1980](#)): “an A [agent] behaving actively, volitionally, and totally upon a definite or referential O [object]” ([Hopper and Thompson, 1980](#)). I agree with this insightful position regarding the *ba*-construction being a highly transitive clause-type. However, some other constructions can also be highly transitive clause-types, e.g., the SVO (subject-verb-object) clause with resultative complement that denotes causation (e.g., (2) 他打破了窗 *Ta da po le chuang*. ‘He hit and broke the window’) is also a highly transitive clause-type: the A (agent) is typically behaving actively, volitionally, and totally upon a typically definite or referential O (object). Nevertheless, the finding of my study on the *ba*-construction being a significance marker is in general consonant with the high transitivity account, in the sense that my finding reveals specific manifestations of high transitivity.

Another important discourse account is **dramaticity** ([Jing-Schmidt, 2005](#)). [Jing-Schmidt](#) finds that the *ba*-construction signals high discourse dramaticity, which is manifested in two ways: cognitive salience; subjectivity and emotionality. These pioneering discourse pragmatic findings, empirically grounded on a systematic analysis of the *ba*-construction in written discourse, further advance our understandings of the subjectivity of the *ba*-construction. As for the exclusive function of the *ba*-construction, [Tao \(2008\)](#) rightly comments that signaling high discourse dramaticity may not be a function exclusively possessed by the *ba*-construction. Nevertheless, the finding of my study on the *ba*-construction being a significance marker is in general consonant with the discourse dramaticity account, in that marking an event as significant is a way of signaling discourse dramaticity.

With a few notable exceptions (e.g., [Jing-Schmidt, 2005](#); [Jing-Schmidt et al., 2015](#); [Tao and Liu, 2010](#)), most existing studies focus on potential forms and meanings based on intuition or written data. Some studies claim to have used spoken data (e.g., [Du, 2005](#)), but the data are usually written in nature (contrived dialogs in novels). Natural interactive data provide another window into speakers’ knowledge of the *ba*-construction. [Jing-Schmidt \(2005\)](#) thus calls for more research to use spoken data. Her recent study ([Jing-Schmidt et al., 2015](#)) is a welcome addition in this endeavor. The study uses the colloquial language sub-corpus of the Peking University CCL Corpus and provides useful findings regarding the high-frequency subtypes of the *ba*-construction. [Tao and Liu \(2010\)](#) is another notable study that uses conversational data; it reveals valuable findings of how the *ba*-construction is used in repair sequences. These studies shed light on our understanding of the *ba*-construction in conversational discourse and demonstrate the fruitfulness of using conversational data.

[Jing-Schmidt and Tao \(2009\)](#) carefully compare the uses of the *ba*-construction and a similar construction – the *jiang*-construction – across different registers in written and spoken corpora and insightfully conclude that they “form the system of disposal in which they share the basic meaning of entity manipulation but contrast in the semantic-pragmatic substance of subjectivity and emotionality.” This study is inspiring to the current study in terms of the use of large-scale natural data and the treatment of the *ba*-construction and other constructions as options in a system.

To summarize, previous studies have provided valuable pioneering findings regarding the function of the *ba*-construction, many of which have inspired the current study. However, an important issue still has not been adequately studied – one that would be critical in revealing speakers' grammatical capacity: the ability to make the choice among all grammatical options in a given communicative context. Why does a speaker need to use a *ba*-construction while the use of other constructions is also grammatical? Previous studies cannot adequately answer questions like this one. This question will be addressed in the current study. I will investigate how speakers in a single conversation actually alternate the use of the *ba*-construction and other constructions to describe the same event, an area that the existing studies have not yet looked at.

2. Data and method

For the analysis of the internal semantic makeup of a construction, I use the construction-chunking approach (Su, 2010, 2011, 2012; Su and Lu, 2010), which maintains that a syntactic construction consists of a chain of semantic chunks. For example, existential constructions in many languages can be analyzed as a chain of semantic chunks that consist of [existential location], [existential relation/manner], and [existential entity] (Su, 2010). This study adopts the analysis of the *ba*-construction as [causer]-*ba*-[affectee]-[cause]-[effect] (Su, 2011). For example, in (1), 'he' is the causer; 'window' is the affectee; 'hit' is the cause, and 'broken' is the effect.

	[causer]-	<i>ba</i> -	[affectee]-	[cause]-	[effect]	
(1)	他	把	窗	打	破	了。
	ta	ba	chuang	da	po	le
	3SG	BA	window	hit	break (COMP)	PFV

'He hit and broke the window. (/He caused the window to break by hitting it.)'

This study focuses on transitive (Hopper and Thompson, 1980) events that have at least two participants (causer; affectee) in the event structure, even though there may be only one participant in the clausal structure (e.g., the unmarked passive construction only specifies the affectee of a causative event).

Below are the definitions of the new terms this study uses.

1) **Lens** is an aspect of linguistic construal. Lens refers to speakers' subjective evaluation of reality, especially their attitudes toward an event. The same event can be evaluated in different ways; for example, highly significant or adverse. Using an analogy – "lenses" are like colorful camera lenses; they paint different pictures of reality. By choosing a particular grammatical construction, the lens of an event that a speaker construes can be expressed linguistically.

For mere expository purposes, my definition of lens here does not make an explicit reference to cases where the speaker is lying, in which case the lens account still applies. For example, the speaker actually thinks that an event is not significant, but for some reason, the speaker wants others to believe that the event is highly significant. In such case, the speaker still needs to use the linguistic device that can construe significance of an event. In other words, the speaker still needs to choose the grammatical construction for the significant lens.

2) As a lens, **significance** refers to speakers' subjective evaluation of an event as being highly consequential, challenging, or important. The significance lens marks an event as being major (non-trivial), highly consequential thus deserving explicit blaming/praising, highly challenging thus entailing special efforts, or having notable worth or importance thus deserving special attention. For any event to be identified as being presented through a significant lens, it has to have at least one of the following conceptual and textual properties:

- i. Presented as being highly consequential: Highly consequential events have more significant impacts. A major textual manifestation of consequentiality is through co-occurrence with a series of results (e.g., denoted in resultatives) that follow the construction.
- ii. The speaker assigns responsibility and accountability to the causer through explicit blaming, or assigns credibility to the causer through explicit praising: A more significant consequence is more likely to incur explicit blaming on the causer; a more significant contribution is more likely to incur explicit praising on the causer. A major textual manifestation is through co-occurrence with lexico-syntactic items or multimodal descriptions that explicitly assign responsibility and accountability or credibility to the causer.
- iii. Presented as having highly important meaning or worth: The more significant an event is, the more it deserves serious attention of the speaker, and the more important meaning or worth it has for the speaker. A major textual manifestation is through co-occurrence with lexico-syntactic items or multimodal descriptions that explicitly indicate the important meaning or worth of the event and/or how it matters to the speaker.
- iv. Presented as being highly challenging to achieve: The more challenging an action is to conduct or a result is to achieve, the more significant it means for the speaker. A major textual manifestation is through co-occurrence with lexico-syntactic items or multimodal descriptions that explicitly indicate high degrees of difficulty.

- 3) **Adjacent alternation** refers to the discourse phenomenon in which alternative grammatical constructions are used to describe the same specific event in real life. The notion of “adjacency” is that of a continuum: Of higher adjacency are cases in which alternative grammatical constructions commenting on the same event are used in proximity in a single conversation or text; of lower adjacency are cases in which alternative constructions commenting on the same event are used not in a single conversation or text but across different conversations or texts. An alternation that involves the use of n ($n > 1$) alternative grammatical constructions is called an n -form alternation. An alternation can be notated with either a path-specified or path-unspecified notation. Whereas the path-specified notation “=>” indicates the temporal order of the constructions used in an alternation, the path-unspecified notation “<=>” does not. For example, in an unmarked passive => *ba* alternation, the speaker(s) first use(s) an unmarked passive construction to describe an event and then switch(es) to using a *ba*-construction to describe the same event. **Alternative use** refers to the occurrence of a grammatical construction in an adjacent alternation. **Single use** refers to the occurrence of a grammatical construction in a discourse environment other than an adjacent alternation.
- 4) The **discourse adjacent alternation method** is a discourse analytical method that investigates the actual alternation of grammatical constructions in natural (conversation & written) discourse. This method could be used to study lenses, functions of grammatical constructions, speakers/writers’ evaluations of a situation, social relationships among participants of a conversation, language ideology, and possibly some other aspects of verbal communication.

This study analyzes cases of high adjacency: Alternative constructions commenting on the same event are used within a single naturally-occurring spontaneous conversation that lasts no longer than 30 min.

This study uses by far the largest videotaped naturally-occurring conversational data to study Mandarin grammar. The data consist of 100 h and one-million-word (1,129,437) transcripts of face-to-face spontaneous conversations drawn from 300 episodes of a famous talk show in Mandarin Chinese – *Qiang Qiang San Ren Xing* ‘Three Companions.’ The talk show, produced by Phoenix Television, is on the Phoenix Chinese Channel and is broadcasted in China. It features a three-person conversation in a casual setting. Each episode has an unscripted conversation that lasts between 20 and 25 min. As far as I know (personal communication with one of the two most frequent guests of the show Zidong Xu²), the videos of this talk show are basically unedited. The participants often describe the same social event with different opinions, a feature that makes the talk show particularly suitable for my research purpose.

My first dataset consists of approximately 1000 min of conversation from 50 episodes. I manually and exclusively coded all the actual grammatical structures that are used by the speakers to describe a transitive event that involves a causer, an affectee, a cause, and an effect. I ended up having 1583 examples that involved 22 major types and 44 subtypes of grammatical constructions. The four most frequent grammatical constructions, which account for 70.1%, turned out to be (Su, 2017a): the *ba*-construction, the unmarked passive construction, the *rang*-construction, and the *bei*-passive construction. I then watched all the 300 videos along with their transcripts and identified 191 alternations from the 100-h database. These 191 alternations involve 470 alternative uses of the four most frequent grammatical constructions, which constitute my second dataset. It contains 110 *ba* alternations that involve 292 alternative uses. My third dataset consists of 5679 single uses of these four grammatical constructions identified from the 100-h database. They include 2526 examples of the *ba*-construction. This task was conducted using the corpus tool AntConc 3.4.4³ and was manually checked. This third dataset was used to quantitatively capture the alternation tendencies and some semantic features.

3. Analysis

3.1. Alternation tendencies

I first conducted a pilot study using the first dataset. 21 alternations involving the 22 Chinese constructions were exclusively identified. The first dataset reveals that among all the 22 grammatical constructions, the *ba*-construction is most likely (71.4%, 15/21) to alternate with other constructions. However, this dataset is not large enough to capture the specific alternation tendencies of the *ba*-construction.

I thus turned to my second dataset that contains 191 alternations in the 100-h database. They consist of 165 nonself-repair alternations and 26 self-repair alternations. The finding of the pilot study that the *ba*-construction is most likely to alternate with other constructions was confirmed: 66.7% (110/165) of all the nonself-repair alternations are *ba* alternations. 50.0% (13/26) of all the self-repair alternations are *ba* alternations. Of all the 110 nonself-repair *ba* alternations, 86.4% (95/110) are 2-form alternations, 12.7% (14/110) are 3-form alternations, and only 0.9% (1/110) is a 4-form alternation. To avoid ambiguity in the analysis of alternation tendencies, I chose to use the 2-form alternations for

² I wish to thank Zidong Xu for providing this useful piece of information.

³ Software developed by Laurence Anthony, Waseda University, Japan. <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/>.

the calculation of alternation rate. This is due to the consideration that there is no direct evidence to prove that, for example, in the case of a 3-form alternation *ba* => UP (unmarked passive) => *bei*, the *ba*-construction alternates with the *bei*-construction – owing to the fact that there is another alternative construction in between the two. An analysis based on all the 2-form *ba* alternations reveals that the *ba*-construction most frequently (29.5%) alternates with the SVO construction, followed by unmarked passives (24.2%), resultatives (21.1%), and *bei*-passives (11.6%).

The rest of Section 3 will focus on the analysis of the *ba*-construction being a significance lens.

3.2. Marking an event as highly consequential

Highly consequential events have a more significant impact. The degree, duration, and magnitude of the change an action results in an entity, an individual, a group, or a society are manifestations of how consequential an event is. For example, the event is likely more consequential to the American society in, say, (6a) *They have made a change to the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution* than in (6b) *The company has made a change to the date of the meeting by moving it to the following day*.

One of the parameters in Hopper and Thompson's (1980) framework of transitivity is affectedness: "The degree to which an action is transferred to a patient is a function of how completely that patient is affected." Consequentiality differs from affectedness in that affectedness is an objective measurement of how completely the affectee in a transitive event is affected, whereas consequentiality is a subjective evaluation of how much impact a transitive event has on the affectee, the speaker, a related entity, individual, group, or society. A transitive event can have lower degrees of affectedness yet higher degrees of consequentiality than another transitive event, and vice versa. For example, the affectee in (6a) is "the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution." The affectee in (6b) is "the original date of the meeting." The affectedness in (6b) can be the same as – if not higher than – that in (6a) because in (6b) the affectee (i.e., the date) is completely changed. However, the consequentiality for the American society is likely higher in (6a) than in (6b). In a word, "significance" is a subjective evaluation. Based on speakers' roles and stakes in an event, different speakers may consider the same event to be of different degrees of consequentiality. For example, a Chinese businessman living in China may not consider a change to the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution highly consequential for him but may consider a change to the date of a meeting in the United States that he is attending to be highly consequential.

The alternation pattern here is that when speakers mark a transitive event as highly consequential, they tend to choose a *ba*-construction and not the other constructions. Below I will use three examples to illustrate.

(7) SVO => *ba* alternation

- Use [SVO] #1 (VO) 1. Dou: 早 就 开始 收 英语 词,
zao jiu kaishi shou Yingyu ci
early EM begin include English word
<Subject ellipsis> have long since started to include English words (in Chinese dictionaries).
2. 就 直接 英语 字母 词。
jiu zhijie Yingyu zimu ci
EM directly English alphabetic word
That is, directly (including) English alphabetic words.
- Use [ba] #2 3. Lei: 有 的 人 认为 你 把 这个 收 了
youde ren renwei ni ba zhege shou le
some People think 2SG BA this include PFV
Some people think that if you include this (i.e., English alphabetic words),
4. 那 还 叫 汉语 吗?
na hai jiao Hanyu ma
then still call Chinese PRT
can (the language) still be called Chinese?

(#20131025)

In example (7), an SVO => *ba* alternation, the prior speaker Dou uses an SVO (VO) construction (use #1, line 1, underlined), whereas the subsequent speaker Lei uses a *ba*-construction (use #2, line 3, underlined). Both grammatical constructions are used to describe the event of including English alphabetic words in Chinese dictionaries. Dou's foci are on: (1) such a phenomenon is not new: *zaojiu* 'have long since' (line 1); (2) directly including English alphabetic words without translating them into Chinese: *zhijie* 'directly' and *zimu* 'alphabet' (line 2). Dou is not talking about how consequential this event is, and he does not use a *ba*-construction. On the other hand, Lei is quoting some people's opinion of opposing the inclusion of English alphabetic words in Chinese dictionaries. Lei uses a *ba*-clause to indicate that such an event is highly consequential, namely, the Chinese language can no longer be called 'Chinese' (line 4).

A major textual manifestation of consequentiality is through co-occurrence with resultatives that follow the construction in question. In my data, it is found that 21.1% of all the *ba* 2-form nonself-repair alternations involve resultatives. This may not appear to be too notable in isolation, yet when it is compared to only 7.5% of the *bei* 2-form nonself-repair alternations involving resultatives, 2.8% of the 2-form unmarked passive nonself-repair alternations involving resultatives, and 0% of the *rang* 2-form nonself-repair alternations involving resultatives (Su, 2017a), the result is quite remarkable. Furthermore, in 87.0% of the *ba* <=> resultative nonself-repair alternations, the *ba*-construction is immediately followed by the resultative, with no other intervening lexical items appearing in between these two constructions. The pattern is:

ba-construction

→ consequence 1: result indicated by a resultative

→ consequence 2

The following example illustrates a *ba*-construction being immediately followed by two consequences. The first consequence is indicated by a resultative *tuifan diao* ‘to overthrow (e.g., a government).’ The second consequence is indicated by the use of a conjunction *jiu* ‘then’ and a verb *biancheng* ‘to become,’ which together signal a result.

(8) *ba* => resultative alternation

Use [ba] 1. Wen: 你 把 总统 推翻 掉。
#1 ni ba zongtong tuifan diao
2SG BA president overthrow COMP
You threw the President (of Ukraine) out of office.

Use [res.] 2. 推翻 掉
#2 (consequence 1) tuifan diao
overthrow COMP
(After) throwing (the President) out of office.

3. 怎么样?
zenmeyang
how
what happened?

(consequence 2) 4. 就 变成 现在 这样。
jiu biancheng xianzai zheyang
Then become now this
It has since become what it is now (in Ukraine).

(#20140430)

In example (8), a *ba* => resultative alternation, the speaker Wen first uses a *ba*-construction (line 1). Immediately followed the *ba*-construction, Wen uses a resultative (line 2) to introduce the first consequence of the event that the *ba*-construction denotes: the President's being thrown out of office. The first consequence is then followed by the second consequence, which is prompted by the use of a question *zenme yang* ‘what happened’ (line 3): Ukraine has become the country we know today (line 4).

The number of consequences that follow the use of a *ba*-construction can be more than two. In such cases, the consequential result after a *ba*-construction is often introduced by a resultative and a temporal expression 之后 *zhihou* ‘after; later’ or 以后 *yihou* ‘after; later.’ *Zhihou* and *yihou* can be used to introduce consequences (Su, 2017b). The pattern is:

ba-construction

→ consequence 1: result indicated by a resultative

→ (resultative) + *zhihou* / *yihou*

→ consequence 2

→ (consequence 2) + *zhihou* / *yihou*

→ consequence 3

The following example illustrates a *ba*-construction being immediately followed by three consequences. The first consequence is indicated by a highly lexicalized resultative *tong guo*⁴ ‘pass (e.g., an act).’ The second and the third consequences are both introduced by the use of a temporal expression *zhihou* ‘after; later.’

⁴ This verb complement is highly lexicalized; however, the two elements “通” *tong* and “过” *guo* are still detachable, and one can insert a negation in between the two elements – 通不过 *tong bu guo* ‘cannot pass’.

(9) SVO => *ba* => resultative alternation

1. Zhang: 大家都非常愤慨的时候,
dajia dou feichang fen'gai de shihou
everyone all very angry ASSOC time
When the public is very angry,
2. 你通过什么都能通过
ni tongguo shenme dou neng tongguo
2SG pass whatever all can pass
you can pass whatever you want to pass.
- Use #1 [SVO] 3. 所以 他 二 天 就 能 通过 两 部 法案,
suoyi ta yi tian jiu neng tongguo liang bu fa'an
so 3SG one day EM can pass two CLF act
So he <i.e., President Roosevelt> was able to pass two acts in one day.
4. 而 这 两 部 法案 在 之前 是 通过 不 了 的
er zhe liang bu fa'an zai zhiqian shi tongguo bu liao de
yet this two CLF act in past EM pass NEG COMP EM
And in the past, these two acts could not be passed,
5. 因为 利益集团 是 不 让 你 通过 的
yinwei liyijituan shi bu rang ni tongguo de
because stakeholder EM NEG allow 2SG pass EM
because the stakeholders would not allow you to pass.
6. 你 通过 了 利益集团 是 不 好 的。
ni tongguo le liyijituan shi bu hao de
2SG pass PFV stakeholder EM NEG good EM
If you pass (these two acts), it is not good for the stakeholders.
- Use #2 [ba] 7. 所以 老 罗斯福 顺水推舟 把 这个 通过 了,
suoyi lao Luosifu shunshuituizhou ba zhege tongguo le
so old Roosevelt push.the.boat.with.the.current BA this pass PFV
So President Roosevelt seized the opportunity (and) had them (lit. this) passed.
- Use #3 [res.] (consequence 1) 8. 通过
tongguo
pass
(They were) passed.
9. 之后
zhihou
after
After (that),
- (consequence 2) 10. 他 这个 安全 体系 建立 起来
ta zhege anquan tixi jianli qilai
3SG this safety system establish COMP
the (food) safety system was established.
11. 之后,
zhihou
after
After (that),
- (consequence 3) 12. 第二 步 我 觉得 是 值得 我们 借鉴 的,
di'er bu wo juede shi zhide women jiejian de
next step 1SG think EM worthy 2PL adopt EM
The next step, (which) I think is worthy for us <i.e., China> to adopt,
13. ...
14. 保护 中 小 企业
baohu zhong xiao qiye
protect medium small business
(is) protecting small business.

(#20140101)

In example (9), an SVO => *ba* => resultative alternation, the speaker Zhang uses three different constructions, an SVO construction (line 3), a *ba*-construction (line 7), and a highly lexicalized resultative construction (line 8) to describe the same event – President Roosevelt's passing two acts. In line 3, the speaker Zhang is making a point that it is very easy to pass an act when the public is angry. When his emphasis is on how easy it is, Zhang does not use a *ba*-construction but an SVO construction.

In line 7, the speaker uses a *ba*-construction, which is followed by three consequences: The first consequence, introduced by the use of a resultative (line 8), is that the acts have been passed. The second consequence, introduced by the use of a temporal expression *zhihou* 'after; later,' is that the food safety system has been established (line 10). The third consequence, introduced by another use of *zhihou* 'after; later' and a positive evaluation of its significance ('worthy for us <i.e., China> to adopt'), is that small business is protected (line 14). In this example, the *ba*-construction is used to describe an event that the speaker is trying to present as being highly consequential.

To summarize, the examples in Section 3.2 illustrate the finding that speakers tend to choose the *ba*-construction over the other constructions to mark a transitive event as being highly consequential.

3.3. The speaker's explicit blaming or praising of the causer

I find that when speakers explicitly blame or praise the causer of a transitive event, they tend to use a *ba*-construction and not the other constructions. A major textual manifestation of explicit blaming or praising is through co-occurrence with lexico-syntactic items that explicitly assign responsibility or credibility to the causer. It is found that in all the *ba* alternations that involve explicit blaming or praising, 90.9% (10/11) of the time the lexico-syntactic items that carry the tone of explicit blaming or praising co-occur with the *ba*-construction, and not the other constructions. For the rest of the time (9.0%, 1/11), the lexico-syntactic items that carry the tone of explicit blaming or praising co-occur with both the *ba*-construction and the other construction. Such lexico-syntactic items include the following kinds:

- 1) Clauses that explicitly assign responsibility to the causer, such as 你们要负责 *nimen yao fuze* 'you should be responsible' (#20130201), 都怪我呀 *dou guai wo ya* 'I am to blame' (#20151021), and 就要检控你 *jiu yao jiankong ni* 'will prosecute you' (#20130307).
- 2) Rhetorical questions such as 干吗 *gan ma* 'how come' (#20151209) and 怎么能 *zenme neng* 'how can' (#20150407) to explicitly blame the causer.
- 3) Derogatory terms to call the villains, such as 禽兽 *qinshou* 'beast; impudent and wicked people' (#20150407).
- 4) Explanations of why the causer has done something wrong. For example, 不查详情 *bu cha xiangqing* 'without checking the detailed situation' (#20150624) and 疏忽 *shuhu* 'negligence' (#20150519).
- 5) Clauses that explicitly praise the causer, such as 我觉得这一点做得还挺好 *wo juede zhe yi dian zuo de hai ting hao* 'I think (they) did a good job on this' (#20150514).

Below I will use an example to discuss how the *ba*-construction is chosen over the other construction(s) to describe an event that entails explicit blaming on the causer.

(10) SVO => *ba* alternation

- | | | | |
|--------|------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. | Dou: | 至今 这 还 是 个 疑案, | |
| | | zhijin zhe hai shi ge yi'an | |
| | | to.date this still COP CLF unsettled.case | |
| | | To date, this is still a mystery/unsettled case. | |
| 2. | | 说 是 不 是 他 先 拿 斧子。 | |
| | | shuo shi bu shi ta xian na fuzi | |
| | | say COP NEG COP 3SG first use ax | |
| | | (People) suspect that he <i.e., Gu, Cheng, a famous modern Chinese poet> | |
| | | first used an ax, | |
| Use #1 | [SVO (VO)] | 3. | 拿 斧子 砍 了 他 老婆, |
| | | | na fuzi kan le ta laopo |
| | | | use ax cut PFV 3SG wife |
| | | | used an ax to cut his wife, |
| 4. | | 伤 了 他 老婆, | |
| | | shang le ta laopo | |
| | | hurt PFV 3SG wife | |
| | | hurt his wife, | |

5. 然后 自己 又 上吊 自杀。
 ranhou ziji you shangdiao zisha
 then self again committ.suicide.by.hanging suicide
 and then committed suicide by hanging himself.

(10+ lines omitted)

16. Dou: 我 听 到 过 两 种 相反 的 意见,
 wo ting dao guo liang zhong xiangfan de yijian
 I SG hear COMP EXP two kind opposite ASSOC opinion
 I have heard about two opposite opinions.
17. 一 种 意见 就是 说
 yi zhong yijian jiushi shuo
 one kind opinion EM say
 One opinion is that
18. 顾城 这 个 人 怎么 说 呢,
 Gu Cheng zhe ge ren zenme shuo ne
 Cheng.Gu this CLF person how say PRT
 Gu, Cheng, this person, how do I put it,
19. 到 最后 就 是 疯 了 吧,
 dao zuihou jiu shi feng le ba
 till the.end EM COP crazy PFV PRT
 in the end, went crazy.

- Use [ba] #2 20. 怎么 能 把 老婆 给 杀 了?
 zenme neng ba laopo gei sha le
 how can BA wife GEI kill PFV
 How could (he) kill (his) wife?

In example (10), an SVO => *ba* alternation, the speaker Dou uses two different constructions, an SVO (VO) construction and a *ba*-construction, to describe the same event – Gu, Cheng's causing his wife to death. Gu is a famous Chinese modern poet. His wife is known to be very committed and devoted to him. However, in 1993, Gu attacked his wife with an ax and then hanged himself. His wife died later on the way to the hospital. In this excerpt, Dou was first talking about the documentary of Gu and how he died. Such a narrative with the use of an SVO construction (use #1, line 3) does not involve explicit blaming. After the narrative, Dou introduces two opinions toward Gu's responsibility for his wife's death. One opinion considers Gu to be crazy and blames him for killing his wife. When introducing this accusatory opinion, Dou uses a *ba*-construction (use #2, line 20). The *ba*-construction is used with a rhetorical question *zenme neng* 'how can' (line 20), further reinforcing the tone of blaming.

The use of a *ba*-construction can mark the result as a significant consequence and blame the agent for having caused a serious consequence. This is especially the case when the *ba*-construction is used with verbs or verb phrases that have negative connotations (such as 害 *hai* 'to harm'). The *ba*-construction carries this function even when its lexical items have neutral lexical meanings (such as 收 *shou* 'to include'), in which case, the *ba*-construction typically co-occurs with other lexical elements to mark the seriousness of the consequence (such as 那还叫汉语吗 *Na hai jiao Hanyu ma?* 'can it still be called 'Chinese'?'). To assign responsibility, the *ba*-construction often takes a syntactically explicit causer, which can be a pronoun (such as 你 *ni* 'you'), a person name, or an address term. I will illustrate this point with the following example.

(11) Intransitive => intransitive => *ba* alternation

1. Xu: 我 在 香港 医院 做 抽神经,
 wo zai Xianggang yiyuan zuo choushenjing
 I SG at Hong.Kong hospital do nerve.killing
 I was doing tooth nerve killing at a hospital in Hong Kong.
2. 然后 抽 到 一半 医生 就 停 下来 了,
 ranhou chou dao yiban yisheng jiu ting xialai le
 then kill till half doctor then stop COMP PFV
 Half way through the process, the doctor stopped

- Use [Intr.] #1 3. 告诉 我 说 他 针 掉 在 里面 了。
 gaosu wo shuo ta zhen diao zai limian le
 tell I SG say 3SG needle drop in inside PFV
 and told me, his needle dropped in (my tooth).

4. 然后 转 一 个 专科,
ranhou zhuan yi ge zhuanke
then transfer a CLF specialist
Then (I was) transferred to (see) a specialist.
5. 医生 很 老实,
yisheng hen laoshi
doctor quite honest
The doctor was quite honest,
- Use [Intr.] 6. 他 就 说 你 针 掉 在 里边 了,
#2 ta jiu shuo ni zhen diao zai libian le
3SG then say 2SG needle drop in inside PFV
he said, you, the needle dropped inside (the tooth).
7. 不 敢 动 了。
bu gan dong le
NEG dare move PFV
and (I) am afraid to move it.
- (18+ lines omitted)
- Use [ba] 26. Bao: 大陆 如果 是 大夫 我 把 一 根 针 断 里头 了,
#3 dalu ruguo shi daifu wo ba yi gen zhen duan litou le
Mainland China if COP doctor 1SG BA one CLF needle drop inside PFV
In Mainland China, if the doctor, I, have dropped a needle inside (a tooth)
27. 而且 这 个 针 取 不 出来,
erqie zhe ge zhen qu bu chulai
and this CLF needle take NEG out
and the needle cannot be taken out,
28. 他们 这 件 事情 肯定 会 闹 得 没完没了 的,
tamen zhe jian shiqing kending hui nao de meiwanmeiliao de
3PL this CLF matter definitely will fight DE endless EM
they <i.e., the patient and his or her family> would definitely force a wild scene without an end.
29. 肯定 会 闹 到 最 低 限度
kending hui nao dao zui di xiandu
definitely will fight to most low limit
(The patient and the family) would definitely demand (the hospital), at least,
30. 就是 一定 要 赔钱 的。
jiushi yiding yao peiqian de
that.is definitely will pay.compensation EM
that is, will definitely demand compensation.
31. 这 件 事情 一定 要 赔钱 的。
zhe jian shiqing yiding yao peiqian de
this CLF matter definitely will pay.compensation EM
An incident like this would definitely demand compensation.

(#20151019)

In example (11), an intransitive => intransitive => *ba* alternation, the prior speaker Xu uses two intransitive clauses (uses #1, line 3 and #2, line 6), whereas the subsequent speaker Bao uses a *ba*-construction (use #3, line 26). Both grammatical constructions are used to describe the event of the doctor accidentally dropping a needle inside the patient's tooth. The two intransitive clauses are quotations of the doctors. It is not in the doctors' best interest to blame themselves for having caused such a medical accident. Therefore, no *ba*-sentence is used in the doctors' accounts. Instead, both doctors use an intransitive clause: the needle dropped – as if the needle dropped on its own, and no one is responsible for such an incident. On the other hand, the speaker Bao, in order to argue that such an incident would cause a serious consequence in Mainland China, uses a *ba*-construction to mark the result as a highly significant (i.e., serious) consequence and assign responsibility for the doctor who has caused such a medical accident.

The use of a *ba*-construction can also mark the result as a significant contribution and praise the agent for having made such a contribution. This is especially the case when the *ba*-construction is used with verbs or verb phrases that have positive connotations. The *ba*-construction carries this function even when its lexical items have neutral lexical meanings (such as 带走 *daizou* 'to take away'), in which case, the *ba*-construction typically co-occurs with other lexical elements to

indicate the significance of the contribution (such as 我觉得这一点做得还挺好 *wo juede zhe yi dian zuo de hai ting hao* 'I think (they) did a good job on this'). To assign credit, the *ba*-construction often takes a syntactically explicit causer, which can be a pronoun such as 你 *ni* 'you,' a person name, or an address term. I will illustrate this point with the following example.

(12) UP (unmarked passive) => *ba* alternation

1. Dou: 李金元 接受 了 报纸 的 访问,
Jinyuan Li jieshou le baozhi de fangwen
Jinyuan.Li accept PFV newspaper ASSOC interview
Jinyuan Li accepted a newspaper interview.
2. 说, 我们 这 次 活动 非常 成功
shuo women zhe ci huodong feichang chenggong
say 1PL this CLF event very successful
(He) said, our event was very successful.
- Use [UP] 3. 垃圾 都 随身 带 走 了。
#1 laji dou suishen dai zou le
trash all with.one take away PFV
(Even) the trash (was) all taken away with (us).
4. 这 东西 挺 有意思。
zhe dongxi ting youyisi
this matter quite interesting
It's quite interesting.
5. Zhou: 我 觉得 这 一 点 做 得 还 挺 好,
wo juede zhe yi dian zuo de hai ting hao
1SG think this one point do DE rather quite good
I think (they) did a good job on this.

- Use [ba] 6. 你 最后 把 垃圾 都 带 走。
#2 ni zuihou ba laji dou dai zou
2SG in.the.end BA trash all take away
In the end, you (even) took all the trash away.
7. 以前 都 觉得
yiqian dou juede
before all think
In the past, (we used to) think that
8. 好像 中国 游客 在 外面 挺 丢人,
haoxiang zhongguo youke zai waimian ting diuren
seem Chinese tourist in oversea quite embarrassing
Chinese tourists tended to (do) embarrassing (things) (while traveling) abroad.
9. 能 做 到 这个,
neng zuo dao zhege
can do COMP this
(This time, Li and his 6,000 employees) could accomplish this.
10. 我 觉得 还是 修正 一下 这个 形象。
wo juede haishi xiuzheng yixia zhege xingxiang
1SG think EM fix a.bit this image
I think they were able to fix the (embarrassing) image of (Chinese tourists) to some degree.

(#20150514)

In example (12), a UP => *ba* alternation, the prior speaker Dou uses an unmarked passive (use #1, line 3), whereas the subsequent speaker Zhou uses a *ba*-construction (use #2, line 6). Both constructions are used to describe the event of 6000 Chinese tourists, who were employees of Li's company, taking their trash away when they left France in May 2015. Dou's description *laji dou suishen dai zou le* '(even) the trash (was) all taken away with (us)' is in the form of a quotation (line 3). Regardless of what the original speech is, here Dou's point is that this event is "interesting" (line 4). Dou is not focusing on how significant the event is, and he does not use a *ba*-construction. On the other hand, the subsequent speaker Zhou gives a positive evaluation of this event and emphasizes that Li and his 6000 employees have made a significant contribution – fixing the embarrassing image of Chinese tourists to some degree. Zhou uses a *ba*-construction to mark the result as a significant contribution and assign credit to Li and his employees.

To summarize, the examples in Section 3.3 illustrate how the *ba*-construction over the other constructions is used to explicitly blame or praise the causer.

3.4. Marking an event as highly important

The use of a *ba*-construction can mark an action as being highly important, in which case, the speaker is usually using the *ba*-construction to request someone to execute such an important action. This is especially the case when the *ba*-construction is used with future events. A major textual manifestation of importance is through co-occurrence with lexico-syntactic items or descriptions that explicitly indicate the importance of the event and/or how it matters to the speaker. It is found that when speakers want to present a transitive event as highly important, they tend to use a *ba*-construction and not the other constructions. I will illustrate this point with examples (13) and (14).

(13) UP (unmarked passive) => *ba* alternation

- 1.Xu: 所以 应该 赶快 做 碟 嘛,
suoyi yinggai **gankuai** zuo die ma
so should **immediately** make disc PRT
So (you) should make a disc **soon**.

2. 很 多 人 都 呼 呼
hen duo ren dou huyu
very many people all advocate
Many people advocate that

Use [UP] 3. 这 个 15 年 的 节 目 应 该 灌 在 这 个 碟 里 边
#1 zhe ge 15 nian de jiemu yinggai guan zai zhe ge die libian
this CLF 15 year assoc show should put on this CLF disc in
the talk show episodes over the past 15 years should (be) put on a disc.

4. Dou: 你 以 为 我 没 想 到,
ni yiwei wo mei xiang dao
2SG thought 1SG NEG think COMP
You thought I hadn't thought about it?

5. 他 们 问 我 说 15 周 年 了,
tamen wen wo shuo 15 zhounian le
3PL ask 1SG say 15 anniversary CRS
They asked me, it's the 15 year anniversary (of this talk show).

6. 咱 们 搞 些 什 么 活 动,
zanmen gao xie shenme huodong
1PL do CLF what ceremony
Let's plan some ceremonies,

7. 是 什 么 讨 论 会、晚 会, 什 么 见 面 会 什 么 什 么 的,
shi shenme taolunhui wanhui shenme jianmianhui shenme shenmede
COP what symposium public party what meeting what what etc.
such as a symposium, a public party, a media event, and things like these.

8. 我 说 这 些 我 都 不 喜 欢
wo shuo zhe xie wo dou bu xihuan
1SG say this CLF 1SG all NEG like
I said I don't like any one of these.

9. 对 吧,
dui ba
right PRT
Right?

10. 我 说 我 只 有 一 个 要 求,
wo shuo wo zhi you yi ge yaoqiu
1SG say 1SG only have one CLF request
I said I only have one request.

11. 我 说 我 只 有 一 个 要 求,
wo shuo wo zhi you yi ge yaoqiu
1SG say 1SG only have one CLF request
I said I only have one request.

12. 现在 有 哪 个 硬盘,
xianzai you na ge yingpan
now have which CLF hard.drive
If somewhere (you can find) such a hard drive,
13. 1.5 T 存 几 千 张 唱片 的,
1.5 T cun ji qian zhang changpian de
1.5 T store several thousand CLF albums NOM
1.5 T, that can store thousands of albums,
14. 1.5 T、 2 T 的 那 种 东西。
1.5 T、 2 T de na zhong dongxi
1.5 T、 2 T ASSOC that kind thing
1.5 T or 2 T that kind of stuff.
15. 我 说
wo shuo
1SG say
I said,

Use [ba] #2 16. 你 把 这 4,000 期 节目 能 不 能 全 刻 进去,
ni ba zhe 4,000 qi jiemu neng bu neng quan ke jinqu
2SG BA this 4,000 episode show can NEG can all burn in
will you be able to put all the 4,000 episodes on (this hard drive)?

17. 我 说 我 愿意 自己 花 钱 买。
wo shuo wo yuanyi ziji hua qian mai
1SG say 1SG willing self spend money buy
I said I would even be willing to pay it out of my own pocket.

(#20130329)

In example (13), a UP => *ba* alternation, the speaker Xu uses an unmarked passive (use #1, line 3), whereas the subsequent speaker Dou uses a *ba*-construction (use #2, line 16). Both constructions are used to describe the action of putting all the episodes of the talk show on a digital storage medium. Xu focuses on the need to do it sooner (*gankuai* 'immediately, soon'; line 1) instead of later, and he does not use a *ba*-construction.

On the other hand, Dou gives an elaborate account (lines 4–17) showing how highly important this action is for him as the host of this talk show. Dou reports a conversation between him and the TV station executives regarding the 15 year anniversary of this talk show. Dou lists a range of ceremony proposals suggested by the executives. Dou rejects every proposal of them before he finally voices his own request. To convey that his request matters to him greatly and that it is the thing he cares most, he says: 'I only have one request' (line 10). Dou even uses a repetition to reinforce this sense of importance (line 11). Dou then goes on to talk about the kind of hard drives that have a large storage. After setting up this elaborated context (lines 4–15), Dou finally uses a *ba*-construction to make his request – putting all the episodes of the talk show on a single hard drive (line 16). After the use of a *ba*-construction, which marks the action as significant, Dou continues to reinforce the sense of how important this action is to him – he would be willing to pay it out of his own pocket, even though he is the host of the show (line 17).

(14) UP (unmarked passive) => *ba* => UP (unmarked passive) alternation

1. Jing: 我 北京 一 个 朋友 的 女儿,
wo Beijing yi ge pengyou de nv'er
1SG Beijing one CLF friend GEN daughter
The daughter of one of my friends in Beijing,
2. 她 说 她 爸爸,
ta shuo ta baba
3SG say 3SG dad
she corrects (lit. to speak, to criticize) her dad ('s behaviors).
3. 她 很 小。
ta hen xiao
3SG very little
She is very little.

- Use [UP] #1 4. 她 爸爸 刷牙 的 时候 水 一直 不 关,
ta baba shuaya de shihou shui yizhi bu guan
3SG dad brush.teeth ASSOC time water always NEG turn.off
Her dad leaves the water running (lit. the water (is) not turned off at all) while brushing his teeth.
5. 她 就 说 爸爸 你 不 能 这样,
ta jiu shuo baba ni bu neng zheyang
3SG then say dad 2SG NEG can this.way
She then said, Dad, you cannot be like this.
6. 非洲 还 有 很 多 人 喝 不 着 水。
feizhou hai you hen duo ren he bu zhao shui
Africa still have very many people drink NEG COMP water
There are many people in Africa who do not have access to water (lit. cannot drink water).
7. 你 怎么 能 这样,
ni zenme neng zheyang
2SG how.come can this.way
How can you be like this?
- Use [ba] #2 8. 刷 的 时 一 要 刷 的 时 就 把 水 关 掉
shua de shihou yiding yao shua de shihou jiu ba shui guan diao
brush.teeth ASS time defini must brush ASS when EM BA water turn off
While brushing (your) teeth, (you) **must** turn the water off while brushing.
9. 就是 她 确实 是 那个 教育,
jiushi ta qeshi shi nage jiaoyu
that.is 3SG indeed COP that education
That (shows) that she indeed has received that (kind of) education.
10. 我 觉得 还 是。
wo juede hai shi
1SG think still COP
I still think (so).
- Use [UP] #3 11. Wen: 但 你 知道 水 不 关 的 那 个 人 会 想 什么?
dan ni zhidao shui bu guan de na ge ren hui xiang shenme
but 2SG know water NEG turn.off ASSOC that CLF person will think what
But you know what is on the mind of that person who does not turn the water off (lit. the water (is) not turned off)?
12. 因为 这 个 话题 我 曾经 真的 跟 人 谈 过,
yinwei zhe ge huati wo cengjing zhende gen ren tan guo
because this CLF topic 1SG ever really with person talk EXP
(I know it) because I have ever really talked about this topic with others.
13. 说 跟 中年 人 谈 节俭 的 这 个 问题,
shuo gen zhongnian ren tan jiejian de zhe ge wenti
say with middle-aged person talk thrifty ASSOC this CLF issue
(I) talked with (some) middle-aged people about being thrifty,
14. 谈 类似 的 话。
tan leisi de hua
discuss similar ASSOC speech
and topics like that.
15. 我们 很 多 中年 人 的 第 一 个 反应 居然 是 什么?
women hen duo zhongnian ren de diyi ge fanying juran shi shenme
1PL very many middle-aged person ASSO first CLF reaction unexpectdly COP what
Unexpectedly, the first reaction of many of us middle-aged people was what –
16. 这 水 我 花 钱 给 的,
zhe shui wo hua qian gei de
this water 1SG spend money give NOM
I pay for the water;
17. 我 不 能 用 啊?
wo bu neng yong a
1SG NEG can use PRT
why can't I use it?

18. 说 人家 那 我 碍 着 他 什么 事,
 shuo renjia na wo ai zhe ta shenme shi
 say others then 1SG hinder DUR 3SG what matter
 It's my own business.
19. 他 碍 着 我 什么 事,
 ta ai zhe wo shenme shi
 3SG hinder DUR 1SG what matter
 It's none of others' business.
20. 你 就 看 到 两 代 人 的 价 值 已 完 变 了
 ni jiu kan dao lian dai ren de jiazhi yiji wan bian le
 2SG EM see COMP two gen per ASS value alre com chan PFV
 eration son OC value ady plet ely ge
 You can see that the values of these two generations are completely different.
 (#20150210)

In example (14), a UP => *ba* => UP alternation, the two speakers use two different constructions – two unmarked passives (line 4, line 11) and a *ba*-construction (line 8) – to describe the same event – whether to turn the water off while brushing one's teeth.

The two speakers use an unmarked passive when they are providing a neutral and factual account. The first unmarked passive, used by the female speaker Jing, is a descriptive – *ta baba shuaya de shihou shui yizhi bu guan* 'her dad leaves the water running (lit. the water (is) not turned off at all) when he brushes his teeth' (line 4). The second unmarked passive, used by the male speaker Wen, is also a descriptive – *shui bu guan de na ge ren* 'that person who does not turn the water off (lit. the water (is) not turned off)' (line 11). This descriptive syntactically serves as a modifier for the noun phrase *na ge ren* 'that person' (line 11).

After the narration of the little girl's father not turning the water off while brushing his teeth (line 4), Jing gives a reported speech of the little girl speaking to her father. This reported speech contains a request carried by a *ba*-construction (line 8). Here the *ba*-construction co-occurs with a modal auxiliary verb *yiding* 'must' to indicate that it is something important to the speaker (i.e., the original speaker – the little girl). Based on what the girl told her father – 'there are many people in Africa who do not have access to water' (line 6), saving water is an important thing for her.

Upon hearing this reported speech, Wen does not comment on the specific topic regarding water saving but instead ties it back to the initial topic of the conversation, which is regarding the differences between the younger and older generations in China. Wen's point is that 'the values of these two generations are completely different' (line 20). Instead of using an unmarked passive, as he does in line 11, here Wen could have used a *ba*-construction and say: 不 把 水 关 掉 的 那 个 人 *bu ba shui guan diao de na ge ren* 'that person who does not turn off the water.' However, Wen does not use a *ba*-construction because his focus is not on how important it is to save water but on how different the two generations' values are.

This example also shows that there can be multiple manifestations of significance in one instance of the *ba*-construction. In this example, the *ba*-construction in use #2 (line 8) has the manifestations of both 'explicit blaming or praising' (*ni zenme neng zheyang* 'how can you be like this') and 'highly important for the speaker' (*yiding yao* 'must').

To summarize, the examples in Section 3.4 illustrate the finding that speakers tend to choose the *ba*-construction over the other constructions to mark a transitive event as being highly important.

3.5. Marking an event as highly challenging

A major textual manifestation of an action or result being highly challenging to achieve is through co-occurrence with lexico-syntactic items that explicitly indicate high degrees of difficulty, such as 特别难 *tebie nan* 'very difficult', 千辛万苦 *qianxinwanku* 'innumerable hardships.' It is found that when speakers want to present a transitive event as a challenging action or result, they tend to use a *ba*-construction and not the other constructions. Below I will use examples (15) and (16) to illustrate this finding.

(15) SVO => *ba* alternation

- Use [SVO] 1. Pan: 这 几 年 人家 <i.e., 桑兰> 都 生 孩子 了
 #1 zhe ji nian renjia dou sheng haizi le
 this several year she even give.birth.to child CRS
 In recent years, she <i.e., Sang, Lan> has even delivered a child.
2. 你 想 想 一 个 截瘫 到 这儿 的 人,
 ni xiang xiang yi ge jietan dao zhe'er de ren
 2SG think think one CLF paralysis to here ASSOC person
 Think about this: as someone who has paralysis from the mid-chest down,

- Use [ba] 3. 人家 千辛万苦 把 孩子 生 下来。
 #2 renjia qianxinwanku ba haizi sheng xialai
 she innumerable hardships BA child give.birth.to COMP
 she has gone through innumerable hardships <lit. thousands of hardships
 and ten thousands of bitter things> to deliver a child.

(#20151202)

In example (15), an SVO => *ba* alternation, the speaker uses two different constructions, an SVO construction (line 1) and a *ba*-construction (line 3), to describe the same event – Sang, Lan's having delivered a child. Sang is a famous Chinese gymnast who was seriously injured in a competition in New York in 1998. Her injury has since then resulted in paralysis from her mid-chest down. In 2014, she gave birth to a child. The speaker Pan is talking about this event. He first uses an SVO construction and then goes on to say that it is not easy for Sang to deliver a child – in fact, it is very challenging. To make such a point, he first notes that she has paralysis from the mid-chest down (line 2). He then uses a *ba*-construction (line 3) to mark it as a highly challenging event. The sense of being challenging is reinforced through the use of an idiomatic expression *qianxinwanku* 'innumerable hardships' (line 3), which is used with the *ba*-construction and not the SVO construction.

(16) *ba* => UP (unmarked passive) => *ba* alternation

1. Shao: 我 尽量 地 想 让 大家 <i.e. 观众> 多 知道 一些。
 wo jinliang de xiang rang dajia duo zhidao yixie
 1SG try ADV want let everyone more know some
 I try to let everyone <i.e., TV audience> know more (about it).
2. 通过 讲 故事,
 tongguo jiang gushi
 through tell story
 Through (methods such as) telling stories,
3. 通过 比喻,
 tongguo biyu
 through metaphor
 through metaphors,
4. 通过 一些 各 种 语言
 tongguo yixie ge zhong yuyan
 through some all kinds language
 through the use of all kinds of language (techniques),

- Use [ba] 5. 把 它 描述 的 复杂 问题 简单化,
 #1 ba ta miaoshu de fuza wenti jiandanhua
 BA 3SG describe ASSOC complicated issue simplify
 to simplify the complicated issues that it involves.

6. 但 这个 特别 难。
 dan zhege tebie nan
 but this particularly difficult
 But this is particularly difficult.

- Use [UP] 7. 复杂 问题 复杂化 特 容易,
 #2 fuza wenti fuzahua te rongyi
 complicated issue complicate particularly easy
 It is particularly easy to complicate complicated issues (lit. complicated issues
 (be) complicated).

8. 囫圇吞枣。

huluntunzao

swallowing.a.date.without.chewing

(Like) swallowing a date without chewing <– to accept the knowledge hastily and without thinking>.

Use [ba] 9.
#3

但是 你 要 把 它 复杂 问题 简单化 很 难。
 danshi ni yao ba ta fuza wenti jiandanhua hen nan
 but 2SG want BA 3SG complicated issue simplify very difficult
 But if you want to simplify complicated issues, (it is) **very difficult**.
 (#20150922)

In example (16), a *ba* => unmarked passive => *ba* alternation, the speaker uses two constructions, a *ba*-construction (line 5, line 9) and an unmarked passive (line 7), to describe the same event – transforming (simplifying or complicating) materials while presenting them. The speaker uses two *ba*-clauses for the thing that he considers “particularly difficult” (*tebie nan*) (line 5) and “very difficult” (*hen nan*) (line 9) and switches to using an unmarked passive for the thing that he considers “particularly easy” (*te rongyi*) (line 7). These three sentences occur in the same turn, an indication of speakers’ striking knowledge about the different functions of the *ba*-construction and the unmarked passive.

To summarize, the examples in Section 3.5 illustrate the finding that speakers tend to choose the *ba*-construction over the other constructions to mark a transitive event as being highly challenging.

3.6. A comprehensive example of *ba* alternation

In conclusion, because the *ba*-construction signals a transitive event as significant, it is found to be often used for blaming, praising, and requesting. Specifically, the *ba*-construction can mark the result as a significant consequence for blaming and assigning responsibility to the causer, mark the result as a significant contribution for praising and assigning credit to the causer (contributor), or mark an action as significant for requesting. Below I will use a more comprehensive example to illustrate this finding in greater detail. In this excerpt, the speaker Dou is making fun of his good friend Xu by using a *ba*-construction, which explicitly blames the causer (i.e., Xu). In other words, Dou is making use of the explicit blaming function of the *ba*-construction to achieve a joking effect.

(17) SVO => *ba* alternation

1. Xu: 我 觉得,
 wo juede
 1SG think
 I think,

Use [SVO] 2. Zhu: 这 其实 害 了, 害 了 李 吧?
 #1 zhe qishi hai le hai le Li ba
 this actually harm PFV harm PFV Li PRT
 This actually does harm, does harm to Li, right?

- 31 Xu: <Xu gives a long multi-line statement expressing his thoughts on Li’s case>

32. 你 [明白 这 个 问题 没有?]
 ni mingbai zhe ge wenti meiyou
 2SG understand this CLF issue NEG
 You [understand this issue?]

Use [ba] 33. Dou: [许老 你 这 番 话 把] 李家 害 得 更 深。
 #2 shi, [@@@]
 Xu.laoshi ni zhe fan hua ba Lijia hai de geng shen
 Prof.Xu 2SG this CLF speech BA Lee’s.family harm DE even deep
 [Xu, what you just said (lit. these words of yours)] causes even greater (lit. deeper) harm to Li’s family. @@@

34. Xu: [哦, 没有, 没有, 不, 不, 不]
 o meiyou meiyou bu bu bu
 oh NEG NEG NEG NEG NEG
 [Oh, no, no, no, no, no.]

35. Zhu: [@@@]

(#20130717)

In example (17), an SVO => *ba* alternation, the prior speaker Zhu uses an SVO construction (line 2), whereas the subsequent speaker Dou uses a *ba*-construction (line 33). Both sentences are commenting on how harmful an event is for the affectee (Li). However, they differ in terms of the indications of how serious the consequence is and whether there is an agent who should be held accountable. The use of the *ba*-construction is found in the situation in which the speaker is stressing higher degrees of consequentiality and assigning responsibility to the causer – Xu. The following textual evidence shows that the speaker Dou, who uses the *ba*-construction (line 33), is indicating that there is a serious consequence and that Xu is responsible for it:

- 1) To assign responsibility, the *ba*-construction takes a syntactically explicit causer – both a person pronoun *ni* ‘you’ and a person name *Xu laoshi* ‘Xu (lit. Teacher Xu).’ The *ba*-construction also specifies what it is about the causer that has caused such a consequence – *zhe fan hua* ‘these words / this statement.’ At the risk of redundancy, the speaker uses three devices – person pronoun, person name, and person-related entity – to assign and specify the responsibility. This feature is even more salient if we compare the *ba*-sentence with the SVO sentence: The SVO sentence (line 2) only takes an unspecified demonstrative *zhe* ‘this’ without specifying any human agents.
- 2) To mark how significant (i.e., serious) the consequence is, the *ba*-sentence explicitly upgrades the affectee from merely one person (Li), which is the case in the SVO sentence (line 2), to the entire family (*Li jia* ‘Li’s family’) (line 33).
- 3) To mark how significant (i.e., serious) the consequence is, the *ba*-sentence explicitly upgrades the seriousness from no specification in the SVO sentence to a specified comparative grade *geng shen* ‘even deeper.’
- 4) The SVO sentence (line 2) is used with a sentence-final particle 吧 *ba* (– not the same word as the one in the *ba*-construction) to indicate Zhu’s uncertainty about whether there is such a consequence. The *ba*-sentence (line 33) does not contain this sentence-final particle.
- 5) Because the *ba*-construction here has a strong effect for blaming and assigning responsibility, upon hearing the accusation carried in the *ba*-sentence, the addressee Xu strongly defends for himself, using a denying hand gesture (Fig. 1) as well as a series of repetitions of negation ‘no, no, no, no, no’ (line 34) to deny the accusation.
- 6) Because the *ba*-construction here has a strong effect for blaming, Dou is using it to make fun of his good friend Xu. This joking effect is evident in a series of laughter (Fig. 2) that immediately follows the use of the *ba*-construction by Dou (line 33). The joking effect is picked up by Zhu as she joins in Dou’s laughter (line 35) (Fig. 3).

3.7. Variation within subtypes of the Ba-construction

There are five subtypes of the *ba*-construction, and their frequency of occurrences varies greatly. This section will address the reason why there are such variation patterns within the *ba*-construction. Based on an exclusive coding of all the instances of the *ba*-construction in the first dataset that contains approximately 1000 min of videos, the predominant subtype of the *ba*-construction, which occurs at a high frequency (87.9%), is the full version that syntactically encodes the most semantic components (Table 1).

Below I will use a *ba* alternation to illustrate the finding that when speakers use a *ba*-construction, they usually specify all the semantic components and would even elaborate on some components. In other words, the *ba*-construction usually



Fig. 1. Xu strongly defends for himself, denying the responsibility Dou has assigned to him.



Fig. 2. A snapshot of Dou's laughter after the use of the *ba*-construction.



Fig. 3. A snapshot of Zhu (the female on the right) joining Dou's laughter.

Table 1
Frequencies of *ba* subtypes in the 1000-min dataset.

C1	87.9% (312/354)	(causer) + <i>ba</i> + affectee + cause + effect
C2	0.6% (2/354)	(causer) + <i>ba</i> + affectee + cause
C3	0.8% (3/354)	(causer) + <i>ba</i> + affectee + effect
C4	3.1% (11/354)	(causer) + <i>ba</i> + affectee + cause / effect
C5	7.6% (27/354)	(causer) + <i>ba</i> + affectee

takes a highly complex syntactic and semantic form, compared to a relatively less complex form the other constructions take when they are used to describe the same event.

(18) UP (unmarked passive) => *ba* alternation

1. Chen: 今天 的 最 大 问题 是
jintian de zui da wenti shi
today ASSOC most big problem COP
The biggest problem today is that

Use [UP] 2. 什么 东西 都 保存 下来 了。
shenme dongxi dou baocun xialai le
#1 whatever thing all keep COMP PFV
everything is kept.

Use [ba] 3. 当 我 把 所 有 的 细 节 有 用 的 没 有 的 所 有 东 西 都 保 存 下 来 后,
#2
dang wo ba suoyou de xijie youyong de meiyong de suoyou de dongxi dou baocun xialai yihou
when IPL BA all details useful ASS useless ASS all thing all keep COMP after

After we keep all the details, the useful, the useless, all the things,

4. 不用 说 多 的,
buyong shuo duo de
needless say more NOM
needless to say,
5. 一 个 人 当 你 晚 年 回 首 的 时 候,
yi ge ren dang ni wannian huishou de shihou
one CLF person when 2SG later.years recall ASSOC time
when you are in your later years and look back upon your past,
6. 听 一 遍 你 都 听 不 过 来 了,
ting yi bian ni dou ting bu guolai le
listen one time 2SG EM listen NEG COMP PFV
you won't be able to finish listening to them even once,
7. 还 要 做 一 个 历 史 研 究。
hai yao zuo yi ge lishi yanjiu
even want do one CLF historical study
let alone doing a historical study (on all the things kept).

(#20130715)

In example (18), a UP => *ba* alternation, the speaker uses two different constructions, an unmarked passive (line 2) and a *ba*-construction (line 3), to describe the same event – keeping records of everything in this digital era. Both forms are embedded as a nominal phrase within a larger clause. Given this syntactic constraint, both forms are expected to have a relatively shorter shape. This is indeed the case with the unmarked passive, *shenme dongxi dou baocun xialai le* (line 2), which has a semantic makeup of [affectee + cause + effect]. However, this is not the case with the *ba*-construction. Despite having the same syntactic constraint, the *ba*-construction is much longer, more elaborate, and more complex: *women ba suoyou de xijie, youyong de, meiyong de, suoyou de dongxi dou baocun xialai* (line 3). This *ba*-construction has a semantic makeup that is more complex: [causer + *ba* + heavily elaborated affectee + cause + effect]. It also has a complex long-term consequence: *Buyong shuo duo de, yi ge ren dang ni wannian huishou de shihou, ting yi bian ni dou ting bu guo lai le, hai yao zuo yi ge lishi yanjiu* 'needless to say, when you are in your later years and look back upon your past, you won't be able to finish listening to them even once, let alone doing a historical study' (lines 4–7).

4. Discussion

This study investigates adjacent alternations of the *ba*-construction with other constructions. It is found that speakers tend to choose a *ba*-construction over the other constructions to present a transitive event as being “significant,” in other words, an event that is highly consequential, for which the causer deserves explicit blaming or praising, that has highly important meaning or worth, or is highly challenging to achieve. Because the *ba*-construction signals the event as significant, it is often used to mark the result as a significant consequence for blaming the causer, to mark the result as a significant contribution for praising the contributor, or to mark an action as significant for requesting.

The main *ba* alternation tendency, *ba* <=> SVO alternation, can be explained by the prototypical function of the *ba*-construction as not being a mere narrative of the event (as is in the case of the SVO construction) but a subjective evaluation of the event. The main *ba* alternation tendency, *ba* <=> unmarked passive alternation, can be explained by the prototypical function of unmarked passives as marking the event as a neutral fact or truth (Su, 2017a), as opposed to the functions of the *ba*-construction to explicitly blame or praise the causer. The main *ba* alternation tendency, *ba* <=> *bei* alternation, can be explained by the prototypical functions of these two constructions: The *bei*-passive construction and the *ba*-construction provide two different kinds of subjective evaluations regarding the two different participants in a transitive event – the *bei*-passive construction evaluates the event as adverse for the affectee (Su, 2017a), whereas the *ba*-construction evaluates the event as significant due to the accountability or contribution of the causer. The most distinctive *ba* alternation tendency, *ba* => resultative alternation, is a textual manifestation of the high consequentiality associated with the *ba*-construction as a linguistic device for the significance lens.

Based on the discussions on how native speakers in real-life communication choose a *ba*-construction over the other constructions, I conclude that the *ba*-construction is a linguistic device for the construe of significance of transitive events:

The ba-construction prototypically marks a transitive event as a significant consequence, contribution, or action, which is highly consequential, highly challenging, or highly important.

The argument about significance made in this study is consistent with Hopper and Thompson's (1980) finding that high transitivity correlates with discourse foregrounding,⁵ namely, clauses with high transitivity tend to predominate in the foregrounded portions of discourse. As Hopper and Thompson rightly note, the *ba*-construction is a highly transitive clause-type. My finding that the *ba*-construction marks a transitive event as significant holds an implication that the *ba*-construction signals discourse significance, namely, it occupies the climax of the local discourse, be it a narrative, an assessment, or a request. As such, the *ba*-construction tends to be found in the foregrounded portions of discourse.

In a similar vein, the construal of significance is consistent with the accounts of subjectivity and discourse dramatization noted in previous studies. My finding that the *ba*-construction marks significance is in general consonant with the high subjectivity account (Shen, 2002; Jing-Schmidt and Tao, 2009) and the high discourse dramaticity account (Jing-Schmidt, 2005) in that marking an event as significant is a way of signaling high discourse dramaticity and as such it increases the subjectivity of the statement by layering on top of it the speaker's subjective assessment of the event. According to Jing-Schmidt (2005), high discourse dramaticity is manifested in two ways: cognitive salience; subjectivity and emotionality. As the current study has demonstrated, the significance lens marks an event as being highly consequential, has highly important meaning or worth, or is highly challenging to achieve. Any one of these situations entails high cognitive salience and thus is of high discourse dramaticity. The findings that the *ba*-construction as a significance marker is often used by the speaker to blame the causer of an event, praise the contributor, or request the addressee to fulfill the speaker's wish suggest that the *ba*-construction is involved with high subjectivity and emotionality. This provides another piece of evidence for the high discourse dramaticity of the *ba*-construction (Jing-Schmidt, 2005). In short, by specifying the ways the *ba*-construction contributes to subjectivity and dramaticity, the findings of this study extend this line of analysis and reveal specific manifestations of subjectivity and dramaticity, as well as the distinctive pragmatic function of the *ba*-construction.

Having argued the pragmatic function of the *ba*-construction being functioning as a device for the significance lens, I would like to discuss how it can accomplish the construal of significance, i.e. what about it as a form-meaning pair that enables it to accomplish such a pragmatic function.⁶ As I mentioned in the literature review, previous research finds that the *ba*-construction is both structurally and functionally marked (Sun and Givón, 1985; Jing-Schmidt, 2005: 60–66). As shown in Jing-Schmidt (2005), there is a correlation between the syntactic markedness of the *ba*-construction and the discourse dramaticity it is used to create. Because significance is a manifestation of dramaticity, a correlation between the syntactic markedness of the *ba*-construction and the discourse significance it signals is expected. This is indeed the case, which I will elaborate on in the following two paragraphs.

In light of the findings reported in Section 3.7, an interesting question arises as to why the full version of the *ba*-construction with all the semantic components syntactically encoded accounts for as high as 87.9% among all its subtypes. This is even more striking when compared to, for instance, only 13.3% of all the subtypes of the *bei*-construction in the same 100-h database being the syntactically and semantically full version (Su, 2017a). I believe that this structural and semantic feature can be explained by the function of the *ba*-construction being device for the significance lens: A full version with the most semantic components (i.e., [(causer)], [affectee], [cause], and [effect]) being specified is an effective way to explain why an event is significant. Specifically,

- 1) if one is claiming that an event is highly consequential, one is usually expected to specify what the consequence is; therefore, the [effect] is likely to be specified. In such case, one would also be expected to explain who or what is being affected to the extent that constitutes a significant consequence; therefore, the [affectee] is required.
- 2) if one is explicitly blaming or praising the causer of a consequence or the contributor of a contribution, one is likely to specify who (or what) the causer or contributor is; therefore, the [causer] is likely to be specified. In such case, one would also be expected to explain who or what is being affected to the extent that deserves the speaker to explicit blame or praise the causer; therefore, the [affectee] is required.
- 3) if one is claiming that an event has highly important meaning or worth, one is usually expected to specify what that particular event is, hence the [cause] (and [effect]).
- 4) if one is claiming that an action/result is highly challenging to conduct/achieve, one is usually expected to specify what that action/result is, hence the [cause] and [effect].

The analysis above suggests that the syntactic markedness of the *ba*-construction (Jing-Schmidt, 2005: 60–66) and its complex semantic makeup correlate with the pragmatic function of the *ba*-construction being a significance marker.

⁵ I am grateful to one of the reviewers for offering the suggestion to address this issue.

⁶ I appreciate this comment from a reviewer.

The concept of “function” is, of course, a complex one that has been explored in various functional approaches to grammar (e.g., Halliday, 1985). What this study adds to this research literature is the finding on the specific effect of grammatical constructions in influencing language users’ evaluation of reality as they are being used as linguistic devices for various lenses that represent reality in various ways. Speakers’ linguistic choice-making involves many factors, including lens (choosing the grammatical construction that can construe a particular lens) and, for example, information flow. In the case of the *ba*-construction, as some previous studies (Li, 2007: 200–206; Lu, 2016) rightly show, *ba*-construction places the agent at the initial place of a clause and thus well suits the situation where the information about the agent has been given in the prior context. However, if the information flow requires the agent to be at the initial place, there are also other grammatical constructions at the speaker’s disposal, including the SVO clause and a topic-comment construction in which the agent is treated as the topic. This indicates that information flow alone cannot account for the full picture of why speakers choose a certain grammatical construction over the others. Likewise, the lens account alone cannot explain the full picture either, especially when different grammatical constructions are combined together. For example, when a *ba*-construction is combined with a *bei*-passive, the use of the *ba*-construction cannot be explained solely on the basis of construal of significance but need to take into consideration the information status of the noun phrase⁷ and other factors. While beyond the scope of this analysis, it is indeed a topic worth exploring. I will leave it for future research to explore the cases where different constructions are combined in a clause.

Finally, I would like to discuss how the notion of lens is different from the other aspects of construal that have been discovered in Cognitive Linguistics, such as specificity, prominence, perspective, and dynamicity (Langacker, 2007). A major difference is that: specificity, prominence, perspective, and dynamicity focus on the description of spatial and temporal relationships between a speaker (or hearer) and a situation; whereas lens focuses on language users’ evaluation of an event, namely, their feelings and attitudes toward the event and how they think of the event and the participants involved. In the case of the *ba*-construction, it has the effect of presenting an event as significant, even though the same event may well be treated as non-significant by a different speaker. In other words, lens is about speakers’ subjective assessment of an event, especially their attitudes toward an event.

5. Conclusion

I have made and supported the claims that “lens” is an aspect of linguistic construal, which refers to speakers’ subjective evaluation of reality (especially their attitudes toward an event) and that “significance” is a lens that refers to speakers’ subjective evaluation of an event as being highly consequential, challenging, or important. I have argued that the *ba*-construction in Mandarin is a linguistic device for the construe of significance of transitive events.

This study presents authentic language data on the use of grammatical constructions in conversations and analyzes linguistic choice-making on a discourse adjacent alternation method. The conversational data on the use of the *ba*-construction presented in the adjacent alternations with other constructions reveals a pragmatically motivated decision behind the grammatical choice, which would otherwise be invisible if the uses of the *ba*-construction were examined in isolation and out of discourse context. The discourse analysis approach also brings to light syntactic and lexical collocation patterns that serve as contextualization cues of stance, which would otherwise be hidden. This is the first study that uses such data and analyzes it by examining adjacent alternation in discourse.⁸

This study contributes to a growing body of studies that examine the intersection between grammar and social interaction. This study provides valuable findings concerning how native speakers actually use these grammatical constructions in spontaneous conversation. The analysis provides useful material for future research both in Chinese linguistics and on other languages whose speakers may be using a similar resource.

A hallmark of human language is the existence of various oppositions among the signs of a linguistic system at any level – phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and discourse, as well as the interfaces among them. These kinds of paradigmatic oppositions have been widely studied in linguistics within markedness theory. What this study contributes to this body of research is the association of linguistic markedness with discourse-level choices among paradigmatic oppositions in social interaction.⁹ This study finds that the syntactic markedness and complex semantic makeup correlate with the pragmatic function of the *ba*-construction being a significance marker. The findings suggest that syntactic markedness and semantic complexity correlate with discourse significance.

The finding that the *ba*-construction is a linguistic device used in Mandarin for the construe of significance of transitive events raises several questions for future research: (1) what linguistic devices are used in Mandarin for the construe of significance of non-/low transitive events; (2) what linguistic devices are used in other languages to construe significance;

⁷ I wish to thank one of the reviewers for raising this valid point.

⁸ I wish to thank one of the reviewers for sharing this comment.

⁹ I appreciate this great point from a reviewer.

(3) what devices are used to construe other lenses in Mandarin and in other languages; (4) whether there is further evidence that supports the association of markedness to significance.

The findings also carry implications for second language teaching, in terms of the design of teaching materials that contain alternative forms as well as methods for utilizing authentic materials. It also shows the importance of not only teaching the use of a certain grammatical construction but also teaching the non-use of it in a given context. For teaching Chinese as a second language, the findings can also help teachers further inform learners how to use these notoriously difficult grammatical constructions.

In all, this study reveals “significance” as a lens that can influence speakers’ linguistic choice-making in conversational discourse. A major kind of language capacity lies in the ability to select the best grammatical option in a given communicative context. This study is dedicated to the understanding of how speakers make the choice among all possible grammatical options. The findings shed light on the pragmatic factors in linguistic choice-making during social interaction.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions (Du Bois et al., 1993, with slight modifications)

- [] Speech overlap
- @ Laughter
- < > Transcriber’s comment

Appendix B. Gloss symbols

1PL	first person plural
1SG	first person singular
2PL	second person plural
2SG	second person singular
3PL	third person plural
3SG	third person singular
ASSOC	associative marker <i>de</i> 的
BA	<i>ba</i> 把 construction
CLF	classifier
COMP	complement
COP	copular verb <i>shi</i> 是
CRS	currently relevant state <i>le</i> 了
DE	resultative complementizer <i>de</i> 得
DUR	durative aspect marker <i>zhe</i> 着
EM	emphasis marker <i>jiu</i> 就
EXP	experiential aspect <i>guo</i> 过
GEN	genitive marker <i>de</i> 的
NEG	negation

NOM	nominalizer <i>de</i> 的
PFV	perfective <i>le</i> 了
PRT	particle, e.g., <i>ma</i> 吗, <i>ne</i> 呢, <i>ba</i> 吧, <i>ma</i> 嘛, <i>la</i> 啦, <i>ya</i> 呀, etc.

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