

Different Meanings and Duration

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Abstract

In Chinese, a sentence of the form “NP1+gei+NP2+VP” is sometimes open to different interpretations, for example, “*Xiao Wang gei Xiao Li da le yi dun.*” In this paper, I apply the method of experimental phonetics to assist in the discrimination of the different meanings of sentences. The results reveal that a Chinese sentence’s meaning of the “NP1+gei+NP2+VP” form is closely related to its duration, that is to say, whether this sentence is a “ba-sentence” or a “bei-sentence” depends to a large extent on NP2’s duration. The sentence is a “ba-sentence” if NP2 is relatively long, it is a “bei-sentence” if NP2 is relatively short.