

Indefinite Quantification of Nouns Having a Unique Reference (Evidence from Vernacular Chinese)

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This article focuses on nouns referring to previously identified entities and yet preceded by an indefinite quantifier. Particular attention is given to the fact that such quantification produces modal effects, an aspect of the problem conspicuously neglected by our predecessors. The intransitive *bǎ* construction in Chinese serves as an illustration of this phenomenon. In Mandarin Chinese the so-called ‘pretransitive’ construction consists in the placement of the direct object before the verb by means of the preposition *bǎ*. However, *bǎ* does sometimes occur in sentences with intransitive verbs. Moreover, the *bǎ* noun phrase, which normally should be definite, is in this case usually preceded by the classifier *ge*, representing a counting unit and associated with indefinite reference. This type of sentence, which can be traced back to vernacular *báihuà* texts, is still in use, although comparatively rare. The present study demonstrates that in such a configuration, as in all pretransitive constructions, *bǎ* marks the patient, even if the latter is the subject of an intransitive verb. Furthermore a certain agentivity is bestowed upon the noun in topic position (before *bǎ*), which may boil down to a mere desire to avert an (unpleasant) event, such as the death of a close relative. Finally, the purpose of putting *ge* in front of a proper or a uniquely determined common noun is not to count, that is, express quantity, but rather to place accent on quality. By referring to an individual occurrence as a member of the notional class denoted by the noun, one highlights the property which defines its elements: for instance, the father insofar as he is a father. Hence the special modal flavor attached to this structure.

Keywords: quantification, modality, discourse/pragmatics, typology, Chinese

1. Introduction¹⁾

This study raises an interesting theoretical issue. What happens when nouns with a specific or definite reference (i.e. proper nouns or common nouns referring to entities previously identified in the context) are modified by an indefinite determiner? The most obvious case is that of proper nouns introduced by an indefinite article such as *a Shakespeare* 'an author like Shakespeare' in English or *un Montaigne* 'an essayist like Montaigne' in French. Proper nouns are distinguished by noncategoriality and unique reference. They are, so to speak, inherently definite and therefore, in languages such as English and French, lack article contrast: *a/the boy* vs. **a/the London*, etc. When they are preceded by an indefinite article they acquire a new meaning, with a special emphasis on quality (Quirk et al. 1974:160; for a thorough discussion of properhood, see Coates 2006).

The phenomenon is not restricted to Indo-European languages equipped with articles. However, it has been less investigated in non-IE languages, in particular East Asian. In that regard the intransitive *bǎ* construction in Mandarin Chinese is very revealing because it provides numerous instances of nouns referring to unique entities and nevertheless preceded by the indefinite determiner (*yī*) *ge* <(one)-CL>. Moreover, the construction allows to compare minimal pairs with and without (*yī*) *ge*, and thus to highlight the modal effects produced by indefinite quantification. That's why I take it as an illustration of this phenomenon in Chinese and, more generally, in East Asian languages. I also make comparisons with English and French, especially in respect of proper nouns.

This article examines the specificities of the intransitive *bǎ* construction in Mandarin, in particular as attested in classic Chinese novels from the 16th to the beginning of the 20th century written in the vernacular (*báihu à*). It is interesting on several accounts. While the *bǎ* construction normally requires that the verb be transitive and the noun introduced by the preposition *bǎ* be definite, in this structure the verb is intransitive and the *bǎ* noun phrase usually preceded by

1) I would like to thank the three anonymous referees for their valuable comments and helpful suggestions.

Abbreviations used throughout this text: VS = verbal suffix, CL = classifier, NEG = negation, PREP = preposition, FP = final particle, DE = subordinative particle, S = subject, V = verb, O = object, N = noun.

the indefinite expression (*yi*) *ge* <one-CL>. Moreover, the construction as a whole carries strong modal connotations. The purpose is to clarify the use of this remarkable structure and to account for its semantic and modal effects.

Generally speaking, the *bǎ* construction involves agentivity, that is, makes reference to the relationship ‘agent-patient’.²⁾ The noun phrase placed in front of the verb by means of the preposition *bǎ* is semantically a patient. The referent of the *bǎ* noun phrase is handled or dealt with, i.e. disposed of, that’s why Wang Li (1979[1947]:160) called the *bǎ* construction *chūzhìshì* ‘disposal form’.³⁾ The *bǎ* noun normally corresponds to the direct object of a transitive verb and, as emphasized by Henne et al. (1977:154), Li & Thompson (1989:465), Fang (1992:324), etc., has a specific or definite reference (*dìng zhǐ*). Yet *bǎ* sometimes occurs with intransitive verbs. Consider the following :

(1) *Tā bǎ ge fùqin sǐ-le.*

<he-BA[PREP]-GE[CL]-father-die-VS>

‘He lost his father.’ [literally ‘He (suffered) his father to die (on him).’]

This sentence raises two problems :

- (a) the noun occurring in topic position is not the agent of the action affecting the patient, indeed, the sentence does not mean that ‘he killed his father (i.e. caused him to die)’ ;
- (b) since *fùqin* ‘father’ has a definite reference (‘his father’), what’s the classifier *ge* used for ?

In order to explain this paradox, we need to confront the operations underlying the markers *bǎ* and *ge* with the meanings conveyed by sentences such as (1). This sentence is remarkable in that it exhibits three characteristics at once : co-occurrence of *bǎ* with an intransitive verb, co-occurrence of *ge* with a ‘definite’ noun, apparent non-agen-

2) A more detailed discussion of *bǎ* can be found in Teng Shou-hsin (1975), Li & Thompson (1981:463-91), Wang Huan (1984) and Audry-Iljic & Iljic (1986). More specifically, Fan (2001) discusses the question of valency, Shen Yang (1997) focuses on the semantic interpretation, while Liu (1997) gives an aspectual analysis of *bǎ*. Cf. also Feng (2001).

3) On historical development, see Peyraube 1985.

tivity of the subject. Some of these points have been tackled separately by authors like Frei (1956-57), Grootaers (1953-54), Lü (1984[48]), Teng (1975), Audry-Ijic & Ijic (1986), etc. In this article I investigate the complex interaction of all these factors, relying when appropriate on the work of my predecessors.

Most of major grammars of Chinese quote instances of the intransitive *bǎ* construction. What is striking is the semantic unity of the examples. They all seem to refer to actions that are detrimental to the subject (or the speaker). This modal connotation is shared by the examples recorded in linguistic surveys and attested in classic novels (ex. 12-18). The lack of diversity does not mean that the construction has gradually fallen into disuse. Rather, it implies that it is relatively rare because the meaning it conveys is very specific.

Modality is defined as expressing the attitude of the speaker towards what s/he is saying (Lyons 1974; Palmer 2001; Portner 2009). In the case under consideration the modal meaning is one of detrimentality and contrariness (*bù rúyì* 'not as one wishes'). The speaker resorts to this structure for pragmatic reasons (Recanati 2004). That's why it occurs in special contexts.

Between 1941 and 1943, Grootaers conducted an in-depth survey at Xicetian near Datong in Shanxi Province. It was a long-term investigation using the method of indirect questioning and based on a large and representative sample of population. Grootaers (1953) noted the relative scarcity of this structure, due to the fact that it appears in a limited number of situations, which is consistent with recent observations.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the Chinese data at the core of the article and a brief review of prior research. Section 3 examines the respective roles of *bǎ* and *ge*. The next section centers around theoretical issues, and introduces a cognition-based theory of quantification (§4). Section 5 concerns the interpretation of nouns preceded by *bǎ* plus *ge*. The article ends with a short summary and an attempt to situate the proposed analysis in the theoretical landscape of quantification (§6).

2. A General Survey of the Facts

Let us first take a look at some examples cited in grammars and linguistic studies. Scholars who treat this question when they discuss the *bǎ* construction focus on either intransitivity or the co-occurrence with the classifier *ge*.

2.1. Chao Yuen Ren

Chao (1968:343-44) draws attention to apparent cases of indefinite reference consisting of a pretransitive with *ge* <CL> or *yī ge* <one-CL> before the object, where something quite definite is referred to.

(2) *Tā bǎ ge píbāo diū-le.*

<he-BA-GE-wallet-lose-VS>

'He lost his wallet.' (Chao 1968:344)

(3) *Tā bǎ ge zhàngfu sǐ-le, kěshì bù jiǔ yòu jià-le ge zhàngfu.*

<she-BA-GE-husband-die-VS-but-NEG-for a long time-again-marry-VS-CL-husband>

'She (suffered) her husband to die (on her), -she lost her husband, but before long she married another husband.' (Chao 1968:344)

Note that in the first sentence we have a formally transitive verb (*diū* 'lose, mislay'), and in the second an intransitive verb (*sǐ* 'die'). According to Chao (1968:344), 'the advanced position of the object, brought about by the pretransitive, has a stronger effect than the presence of the word *ge* or *yī ge* in deciding the definiteness of reference.'

Here are two more examples of *bǎ* with an intransitive verb :

(4) *bǎ ge zéi pǎo-le.*

<BA-GE-thief/burglar-escape/flee-VS>

'allowed the burglar to escape' (Chao 1968:345)

(5) *bǎ ge fùqīn sǐ-le*

<BA-GE-father-die-VS>

'lost one's father' [suffered the loss of one's father] (Chao 1968: 345)

Chao argues that in (4) and (5) *bǎ* has a causative meaning ‘causes to’ or ‘allows to’.

The authors of *Xiàndài hànyǔ xūcí lishi* (1982:65) quote a similar sentence, containing both an intransitive verb and *ge* modifying a proper noun :

- (6) *Gōngshè chénglǐ-le, bǎ ge Lǐ lǎo nǎinai lè de hé-bu-lǒng zuǐ.*
 <commune-found-VS-BA-GE-Li-old-grandmother-joyful-DE-close-NEG-bring together-mouth>
 ‘The establishment of the commune made grandma Li so happy that she could not stop smiling.’

2.2. Zhu Dexi

Zhu (1982:187) gives another instance when, in the section on *bǎ*, he addresses the issue of the co-occurrence of *ge* with a proper noun :

- (7) *Piānpiān yòu bǎ ge Lǎo Wáng bìngdǎo-le.*
 <contrary to expectations-again-BA-GE-Lao Wang-be down with an illness-VS>
 ‘That (a man such as) Lao Wang should be bedridden!’

2.3. Lü et al.

Lü et al. (1980:49) contrast two intransitive *bǎ* sentences, one with *ge* and the other without *ge*, both specified semantically as *bù rúyì* ‘not in accordance with one’s wishes, not going the way one wants, the opposite of what one wants’ :

with *ge*

- (8) *Zhēn méi xiǎngdào, bǎ ge dàsǎo sǐ-le.*
 <really-NEG-expect sth to happen-BA-GE-elder brother’s wife-die-VS>
 ‘Who would have thought that (a woman such as) the sister-in-law would die!’

without *ge*

- (9) *Piānpiān bǎ Lǎo Lǐ bìng-le.*

<contrary to expectations-BA-old-Li-fall ill-VS>
 ‘To think that Lao Li has fallen ill!’

This modal connotation is highlighted in the translation(s).

2.4. Liu et al.

Liu et al. (1983:477) group under the heading *bù rúyì* ‘not as one wishes’ sentences with verbs expressing disappearance. They observe that such sentences are used mainly in the spoken language.

- (10) *Zěnmē bǎ ge tēnwu pǎo-le?*
 <how-BA-GE-secret agent/spy-escape/flee-VS>
 ‘How could (such a prisoner as) that spy be allowed to run away?!’

The person referred to is determined in the context (definite reference).

- (11) *Tā piānpīān yòu bǎ ge màozi méi le, chūqu duó lěng a!*
 <he-contrary to expectations-again-BA-GE-hat-be without-hat-LE-go out-how!-cold-FP>
 ‘Once again, he just had to find himself without his hat, it’s so terribly cold outside!’

Although the verb *méi* ‘not have’, equivalent to *méi yǒu* <NEG-have>, is formally transitive, it should be noted that it is not an action verb, but rather a sort of stative verb with locative meaning. Both *yǒu* and *méi* express the idea of location, respectively, ‘is located relative to, there is’ and ‘is not located relative to, there is not’.⁴⁾ *Méi* is therefore pseudo-transitive, and behaves more like an intransitive verb. As a result, in conjunction with *bǎ* involving agentivity, *méi* can only be construed as referring to a change of state, hence the meaning of ‘disappearance’. Liu et al. (1983:477) draw attention to this fact by pointing out that between the verb of the predicate and the noun introduced by *bǎ* ‘there is no conceptual verb-object relationship’ (*méi yǒu yìniàn shàng de dòng-bīn guānxi*). Note also that the subject of the sentence is

4) Semantically, the subject of *yǒu/méi* (*yǒu*) is a locator, not an agent.

non-agentive and has no influence over the action (change of state).

2.5. Lü Shuxiang

In his articles on *ge* (1984[1944]) and *bǎ* (1984[1948]), Lü Shuxiang quotes examples culled from classic novels written in the vernacular (*báihuà*) of Qing times, the most recent *Lǎo Cán yóu jì* ‘The travels of Lao Can’ dates from the beginning of the twentieth century (1904-1907). Let us examine some of these sentences :

- (12) *Zhǐ zhèi yī jù, bǎ ge Jiǎng Píng xià-le yī tiào.*
 <only-this-one-sentence-BA-GE-Jiang Ping-frighten-VS-one-jump/leap>
 ‘This sentence alone made (such a man as) Jiang Ping jump with fright.’
 (*Sān xiá wǔ yì*, chap.109.6, Lü 1984 :164)
- (13) *Bǎ ge Zhāng gūniang xiū de wú-dì-zì-róng.*
 <BA-GE-Zhang-girl-ashamed-DE-can find no place to hide oneself (for shame)>
 ‘This made (a person such as) Miss Zhang feel so embarrassed that she didn’t know where to put herself.’ (*Èrni yīngxióng zhuàn*, chap. 9.24, Lü 1984 :192)
- (14) *Bǎ ge Lǐ Wán hé Zǐ Juān kū de sǐ-qì huó-lái.*
 <BA-GE-Li Wan-and-Zi Juan-cry-DE-hovering between life and death>
 ‘This made Li Wan and Zi Juan cry themselves half dead.’
 (*Hóng lóu mèng*, chap. 98.8, Lü 1984 :192)
- (15) *Bǎ ge Shā Lóng hē de mǐngdǐng-dàzui.*
 <BA-GE-Sha Long-drink-DE-be dead drunk>
 ‘That made Sha Long drink himself to death.’ (*Sān xiá wǔ yì*, chap. 109.2, Lü 1984 :192)
- (16) *Bǎ ge Chū dànángzi máng-le ge shǒu-jiǎo-bù-xián.*
 <BA-GE-Chu-aunt-busy-VS-CL-hand-foot-NEG-idle>
 ‘This kept Aunt Chu so busy that she was perpetually on the

move.’

(*Èrmü yīngxióng zhuàn*, chap. 17.4, Lü 1984 :192)

- (17) *Piān yòu bǎ Fēng yātou bìng-le.*

<contrary to expectations-again-BA-Feng-maidservant-fall ill-VS>

‘And to crown it all, the maidservant Feng had to fall ill.’

(*Hóng lóu mèng*, chap. 76.2, Lü 1984 :194)

- (18) *Jiǎ lǎo’er jì bǎ ge dà érzi sǐ-le, zhèi èr érzi biàn chéng-le ge bǎobèi.*
<Jia-old man-already-BA-GE-elder son-die-VS-this-younger son-then-become-VS-CL-treasure>

‘Old man Jia, having lost his elder son, cherished the younger as if he were a treasure.’

(*Lǎo Cán yóu jì*, chap.15.3, Lü 1984 :194)

2.6. Wang Huan

Wang Huan (1984:31) also gives examples drawn from classic novels in the vernacular :

- (19) *Bǎ Xīmén Qìng chī de mǐngdǐng-dàzui.*

<BA-Ximen Qing-eat-DE-be dead drunk>

‘That caused Ximen Qing to get dead drunk during the meal.’

(*Jīn píng méi*, chap.1, Wang Huan 1984:31)

- (20) *Bǎ Zhōu xiānsheng xiū de liǎn shàng hóng yī kuài bái yī kuài.*

<BA-Zhou-Mr-ashamed-DE-face-on-red-one-CL-white-one-CL>

‘That made Mr. Zhou feel so ashamed that his face flushed and turned pale by turns.’

(*Rúlín wàishǐ*, chap. 2, Wang Huan 1984:31)

- (21) *Zěnnme bǎ ge Qìng Wén zǐzǐ [jiějie] yě méi le.*

<how-BA-GE-Qing Wen-elder sister-also-there is not-FP>

‘How come even Elder sister Qing Wen isn’t here ?!’

(*Hóng lóu mèng*, chap. 79, Wang Huan 1984:31)

- (22) *Dào bǎ ge Xiāng Líng jí de liǎn zhàng tōng hóng.*

<but-BA-GE-Xiang Ling-angry-DE-face-swell-very red>

‘But this irritated Xiang Ling so much that his face swelled and went crimson.’

(*Hóng lóu mèng*, chap. 120, Wang Huan 1984:31)

Note that in the above sentences, including those with the transitive verbs *hē* ‘drink’ and *chī* ‘eat’, *bǎ* introduces the subject of the action and not the object.

2.7. Grootaers

The examples taken from famous novels like *Hóng lóu mèng* may give the impression of being literary.⁵⁾ However, all scholars are unanimous in thinking that this construction belongs to the spoken language.⁶⁾ This is consistent with the observations made by Grootaers during his extensive fieldwork on the initial *bǎ* in a Shānxī dialect. Spoken evidence he gathered is similar in every respect to the data derived from texts in the written vernacular. For example :

(23) *Bǎ ge èrxiǎozǐ sǐ-le.*

<BA-GE-second son-die-VS>

‘That second son (of his) died.’ (Grootaers 1953-54:43)

(24) *Bǎ nài ge hǎo rén jiù sǐ-le.*

<BA-that-GE-good-man-then-die-VS>

‘That such a good man should die.’ (Grootaers 1953-54:43)

(25) *Bǎ liǎng ge nǚzi tóng sǐ-le.*

<BA-two-GE-daughter-together-die-VS>

‘Both his daughters died.’ (Grootaers 1953-54:44)

(26) *Bǎ fāngzi tā-le.*

<BA-house-collapse-VS>

‘(After the rain) the house collapsed.’ (Grootaers 1953-54:44)

(27) *Bǎ nài ge rén sǐ-le.*

5) Thus, Wang Li (1979:169) uses example (17) as an illustration of the intransitive *bǎ* construction in the Modern language.

6) This was confirmed by Zhu Dexi (November 1986).

<BA-that-GE-man-die-VS>

'That man died.' (Grootaers 1953-54:45)

(28) *Bǎ tā fùqin sǐ-le.*

<BA-he-father-die-VS>

'His father died.' (Grootaers 1953-54:46)

This is only a small part of Grootaers' corpus. I leave aside *bǎ* sentences with a predicative complement expressing extent (Li & Thompson, 1989:626-27), since we have already seen several such examples above (6, 13, 14, 15, 19, 22).

2.8. Mullie

Mullie (1932:184) gives two examples of the intransitive *bǎ* construction collected in Jehol (*Rèhé* region) :

(29) *Tā bǎ ge niángmenr sǐ-le.*

<he-BA-GE-wife-die-VS>

'His wife is dead.' / 'He lost his wife.'

(30) *Wǒmen bǎ ge bǎrtou hái bìng-le.*

<we-BA-GE-workmaster-also/too-fall ill-VS>

'Besides our workmaster fell ill.'

2.9. Frei

Frei (1956/57:43) compares the last sentence to example (17) taken from *Hóng lóu mèng*. He remarks that this type of construction, in which intransitive *bìng* 'fall ill' co-occurs with *bǎ*, is also current in the modern Peking dialect, where one can hear :

(31) *Bǎ tā diē bìng-le.*

<BA-he-father-ill-VS>

'His father is ill.' (Frei 1956:44)

There is considerable evidence to show that this pattern is peculiar to Northern Mandarin. It is attested in northern dialects (including that

of Peking) and in *báihuà* (the written vernacular).

3. The Respective Functions of *Bǎ* AND *GE*

I now turn to the co-occurrence of *bǎ* with an intransitive verb as well as the meaning of the noun preceded by the classifier *ge*.

3.1. *Bǎ* with an intransitive verb

Such sentences are particularly incongruous if one considers the *bǎ* construction 'S *bǎ* VO' as being derived from the base structure SVO, which would imply that the verb must be transitive. Recall that the possibility of moving the object by means of the preposition *bǎ* before the verb was traditionally used as the criterion for determining whether a verb is transitive or not (Jahontov 1957; Yahongtuofu 1958). Viewed in this perspective, it is rather disconcerting that *bǎ* should introduce the subject of an intransitive verb. Zhu (1982:186-89), among others, has shown that this position is untenable. This is particularly striking when the verb has two objects, as in :

(32) *Tā bǎ júzi bāo-le pí.*

<he-BA-orange-peel-skin>

'He peeled the orange.' [literally: What he did to the orange was to peel its skin.]

The sentence corresponds to the pattern S *bǎ* O₁ V O₂, where O₁ (the referent of the *bǎ* noun phrase) represents the entity affected by the action of the verb, the one to which something happens, and O₂ the grammatical direct object of the verb. An agent (wheteher expressed or unexpressed) produces a change in O₁, that is, causes it to change in some way through the action V. The role of the grammatical direct object is essentially to specify or qualify this change. O₂ indicates what precisely the action V does to O₁. As noted by Li & Thompson (1989:472), there is often a relationship of possession between O₁ and O₂, although this is not indispensable. The only way to express that is by using *bǎ*, there is no corresponding base structure without *bǎ*.⁷⁾

Another such case is the intransitive *bǎ* construction. If *bǎ* is deleted, the noun becomes the subject of an intransitive verb. Here, too, it is impossible to reconstruct the pattern SVO in which the noun previously introduced by *bǎ* would be the object of the verb. Zhu (1982:188) gives an illustration of this :

- (33) *Bǎ fānrén pǎo-le.*
 <BA-prisoner-flee-VS>
 ‘The prisoner (was allowed to) flee.’

Without *bǎ*, *fānrén* ‘prisoner’ becomes the subject of *pǎo* ‘to flee’ and not its object :

- (34) *Fānrén pǎo-le.*
 <prisoner-flee-VS>
 ‘The prisoner fled.’

Zhu (1982:188) concludes that the *bǎ* construction is in fact related, not to the SVO sentences, but to the sentences whose subject *zhǔyǔ* is non-agentive. Indeed, *bǎ* cannot introduce a noun indicating an agent (an entity acting upon another entity), which rules out the subject of a transitive verb. Therefore after *bǎ* we can only have the subject of an intransitive verb or the object of a transitive verb.

If *bǎ* is deleted in a sentence with a transitive verb, one gets a passive sentence. Compare:

- (35) *Bǎ yīfu dōu xǐ-gānjìng le.*
 <BA-clothes-all-wash.clean-LE>
 ‘have washed the clothes’ (Zhu 1982:188)
- (36) *Yīfu dōu xǐ-gānjìng le.*
 <clothes-all-wash.clean-LE>
 ‘The clothes have been washed.’ (Zhu 1982:188)

If *bǎ* is deleted in a sentence with an intransitive verb, one gets an active sentence like (34) above.

7) Cf. also Jin (1997:422).

According to Zhu (1982:185), the primary function of *bǎ* is to ‘introduce the patient’ (*yǐnchū shòushì*), i.e. the entity which is affected by the action of the verb. One should make this statement even more forceful. Since there is only one marker *bǎ*, it must fulfill the same fundamental function in all cases, including those that appear as exceptions to the rule. Audry-Iljic & Iljic (1986:46) have shown that in a subjectless sentence such as :

- (37) *Bǎ wǒ qìsǐ-le.*
 <BA-I-be angry.die-LE>
 ‘That made me terribly angry.’

the presence of *bǎ*, as opposed to its absence, signals that the person who gets angry is actually brought into this state by something else (a situation, a fact), left unexpressed here. The use of *bǎ* induces causativity. Compare with (38) below :

- (38) *Wǒ qìsǐ-le.*
 <I-be angry.die-LE>
 ‘I am terribly angry.’

Lü Shuxiang (1984:192[1948:124]) observed that in certain *bǎ* sentences comprising an intransitive verb (mostly expressing feelings) the verb takes on a causative meaning and becomes transitive. This phenomenon is particularly frequent with verbs followed by a complement of extent (degree) introduced by *de* or *ge* as in :

- (39) *Dāngxià xiān bǎ Dèng Jiūgōng lè-le ge pāi-shǒu-dǎ-zhǎng.*
 <instantly-at first-BA-Deng Jiugong-happy/joyful-VS-GE-clap
 one’s hands>
 ‘That instantly made Deng Jiugong so happy that he clapped his hands.’
 (*Èrmǔ yīngxióng zhuàn*, chap. 19.11, Lü 1984:192)

This type of sentence is fairly common and quite productive (cf. examples 6, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 22).

In summary, two types of intransitive *bǎ* construction are to be

distinguished. The first one is characterized by the verb being followed by a complement of extent/degree or by *ge* (see above), the second includes all the other intransitive *bǎ* sentences.

The sentences of the first type have a causative meaning. The action is done to such an extent that the result is the state expressed by the stative clause introduced by *de* or *ge*. This group poses no problem. The referent of the *bǎ* noun phrase, i.e. the patient, is affected by the action of the verb, the intensification of the action causes a qualitative change in the patient.

The second type is more intriguing. It has two major characteristics: (a) the connotation *bù rúyì* 'contrary, not as one wishes', (b) a limited number of compatible verbs. For example:

(40) *Qùnián yòu bǎ ge lǎobànr sǐ-le.*

<last year-again-BA-GE-husband or wife (of an old married couple)-die-VS>

'To crown it all her husband (his wife) died last year!'

(Sun et al. 1995:264)⁸

This kind of sentence is already reported in Courant (1914):

(41) *Yòu bǎ tā diē sǐ-le.*

<again-BA-he-father-die-VS>

'And on top of everything else, his father died.'⁹

(a) The strong modal connotation *bù rúyì* is the most prominent feature of this class of sentences. It is frequently reinforced by the adverbs *yòu* 'on top of everything else' and *piānpīān* 'contrary to expectations'. This connotation is absent from the utterances with a complement of extent/degree (see above). However, what is common to all intransitive *bǎ* sentences is that the subject has no control over the situation.

(b) the number of verbs that occur in the second group is extremely limited: *sǐ* 'die' comes first, followed by *bìng* '(fall) ill' and *pǎo*

8) Zhu (1982:187) quotes a similar instance without *ge*, cf. ex. (41).

9) In his review of Courant's grammar, Maspero (*BEFEO*, 1914, XIV.9:78) noted that this construction is 'less strange and, above all, less rare than the authors' comment would suggest'.

in the sense of ‘run away, escape, flee’. It goes without saying that death, illness and escape (flight) always mean a great loss to the subject (speaker) and are regrettable.

In this connection, note that Mullie proposes for the sentence *Tā bǎ ge niángmenr sǐ-le*. ‘His wife is dead’ (ex. 29 above) yet another translation which renders the sense of loss more accurately, namely ‘He has been deprived of his wife.’ Compare with Chao’s rendering of example (3): ‘She (suffered) her husband to die (on her), -she lost her husband’.

For his part, Zhu (1982:1987) observes that in examples in which the *bǎ* noun phrase refers to the subject of the action, as in :

- (42) *Bié bǎ fànrén pǎo-le*.
 <NEG-BA-prisoner-flee-VS>
 ‘Do not let the prisoner run away.’ (Zhu 1982:187)

and

- (43) *Qùnián yòu bǎ lǎobànr sǐ-le*.
 <last year-again-BA-husband or wife-die-VS>
 ‘To crown it all her husband (his wife) died last year!’
 (Zhu 1982:187)

the verb is intransitive and usually marks a disappearance (*xiāoshì*).

In this respect, (42) and (43) are comparable to sentences with pseudo-transitive verbs expressing the loss or disappearance of the ‘object’, such as examples (2) and (11) above containing the verbs *diū* ‘lose’ and *méi* ‘not have (there is not, be without)’ respectively.

Here are two other examples with *méi*:

- (44) *Yī zhuǎn yǎn de gōngfu, bǎ ge màozi méi le*.
 <one-twinkling of an eye-DE-time-BA-GE-hat-not have-LE>
 ‘In a twinkling of an eye, my hat was lost.’ (Mullie 1937:275)
- (45) *Zěnmē hūrán bǎ ge Qíng Wén jiějie yě méi le?*
 <how-suddenly-BA-GE-Qing Wen-elder sister-also-not have-LE>
 ‘How come even Elder sister Qing Wen suddenly vanished?!’

(*Hóng lóu mèng*, chap. 79, Grootaers 1953/54 :55; Wang Li 1979:171; Shen J. 2002:394)

As indicated earlier, although *méi* (*yǒu*) ‘not have (there is not, be without)’ is formally transitive, it actually marks a state (location) and not an action. By the same token, the subject of *diū* ‘lose, mislay’ does not control the action but is affected by it, in other words, he *suffers* a loss (non-intentionality).

The parallel made by Chao (1968) and Liu et al. (1983) between intransitive and (pseudo-) transitive *bǎ* sentences is quite justified. Significantly, in the transitive examples – just as in their intransitive counterparts of the *tā bǎ ge fùqin sīle* type –, it is the insertion of *ge* into the *bǎ* noun phrase that intensifies the feeling of great or cruel loss.

3.2. *Bǎ* plus *ge*

The classifier *ge* can modify nouns with unique reference: either proper nouns or common nouns referring to entities identified in the context, like *fùqin* ‘father’ in example (1).

- (46) *Tā zěnmē bǎ ge Lǎo Lǐ dézui-le?*
 <he-how-BA-GE-Lao Li-offend-VS>
 ‘How come he offended (a man such as) Lao Li?!’

It is claimed that the noun introduced by *bǎ* must be definite, otherwise it cannot appear in this construction. If we accept this assumption, then we have to explain why in some cases *bǎ* is followed by (*yī*) *ge* or by *yī* ‘one’ plus another classifier, which is not especially rare.

In fact, as pointed out by Liu et al. (1983:469), (*yī*) *ge* may refer to one particular entity, a certain person or thing, but which the speaker need not or is unable to specify.

- (47) *Gāngcái wǒ bǎ yī ge háizi pèngdǎo-le.*
 <a moment ago-I-BA-one-GE-child-bump into.topple-VS>
 ‘I’ve just knocked a child down.’/ ‘I’ve just run a child over.’
 (Liu et al. 1983:469)
 [It is a question of a given child, posited existentially, not just

any child whatsoever.]

- (48) *Lǎo Mǎ cóng nǐ de shūjià shàng bǎ yī běn shū nǎzǒu-le, wǒ méi kàn shūmíng.*

<Lao Ma-PREP-you-DE-bookshelf-on-BA-one-CL-book-take.go away-VS-I-NEG-see-title>

‘Lao Ma took away a book from your bookshelf, I didn’t see the title.’ (Liu et al. 1983:469)

[Again, it is a matter of one particular book, a certain book.]¹⁰

The inescapable conclusion is that the *bǎ* noun phrase refers to something **given**, that is, posited in the context. *Bǎ* gives existential status to what is denoted by N. This case is encountered frequently in texts such as do-it-yourself instructions, recipes and so on, when the materials or ingredients are not listed at the outset, but introduced progressively as the task advances. For example :

- (49) *Bǎ yī zhī pīngpāngqiú fàng zài hézi de zuǒ shàngjiǎo, [...]*

<BA-one-CL-ping-pong ball-put-be located-box-DE-left-upper corner>

‘Place a ping-pong ball in the left upper corner of the box, [...]’ (*Ertóng shídài* 185.4:43)

- (50) *Bǎ yī gēn dàizi duìzhé, zhé huán xiàng shàng, wò zài zuǒ shǒu zhōng.*

<BA-one-CL-ribbon-fold in two-bend/fold-loop-towards-up-hold-be located-left-hand-in>

‘Fold a ribbon in two, the loop upwards, and hold it in your left hand.’ (*Ertóng shídài* 1985.4:44)

We are dealing with a given ping-pong ball, a given ribbon. This is reminiscent of the way objects are posited in mathematical problems : let ABCD be a rectangle, given an isosceles triangle, it is assumed that..., suppose that..., (let us) take it that..., take... Asserting the existence of something (existential quantification) is consistent with the

10) See also Li Ying-che (1974:207), Ding Shengshu (1979:95), Wang Huan (1984: 25-28, 1985), Lu Jianming & Ma Zhen (1985:203-205), Audry-Ijic & Ijic (1986: 22-23), Song Yuzhu (1995:354-357), Shen Jiaxuan (2002:391-395), etc.

etymology of *bǎ*, namely ‘hold, grasp, take’.

The problem of the classifier *ge* in the sentences in hand is not so much that it occurs between *bǎ* and the noun (there are other examples), but rather that it modifies something that is unique, the only one of its kind (unique reference). In order to ascertain the role of *ge*, we shall compare two identical sequences, one without and the other with CL :

(46) *Tā zěnmē bǎ Lǎo Lǐ dézui-le ?*

<he-how-BA-Lao Li-offend-VS>

‘How come he offended Lao Li?’

(46) *Tā zěnmē bǎ ge Lǎo Lǐ dézui-le ?*

<he-how-BA-GE-Lao Li-offend-VS>

‘How come he offended [even] a man such as Lao Li?’

(7) *Piānpīān yòu bǎ Lǎo Wáng bìngdǎo-le.*

<contrary to expectations-again-BA-Lao Wang-be down with an illness-VS>

‘That Lao Wang should be bedridden!’

(7) *Piānpīān yòu bǎ ge Lǎo Wáng bìngdǎo-le.*

<contrary to expectations-again-BA-GE-Lao Wang-be down with an illness-VS>

‘That a man such as Lao Wang should be bedridden!’

Ge adds a modal and contrastive value. The focus is on the fact that this happened to Lao Li or Lao Wang and not to some other person. In other words, *ge* brings out the contrast between Lao Li or Lao Wang and others. He managed to offend even Lao Li, such a nice and placid man. And it just had to be Lao Wang to be confined to bed with illness, and not someone else. Zhu’s (1982:187) explanation of the presence of *ge* before a proper noun in example (7) is quite illuminating. Although Lao Wang refers to a definite person, the speaker did not expect that the one who would get ill would be Lao Wang, rather than X or Y. This shade of meaning is made explicit by the adverb *piānpīān* ‘contrary to expectations’.¹¹⁾

Here, (*yī*) *ge* is not used for counting (quantification) but to high-

light the qualitative aspect: ‘even someone like Lao Li’, ‘and it just had to be a man such as Lao Wang’. That is, Lao Wang is contrasted with persons who do not possess the **quality** of ‘being Wang’.

4. Theoretical Considerations

4.1. Cross-linguistic Evidence

According to Lü (1984[44]), who discussed the problem of (*yī*) *ge* modifying proper names, (*yī*) *ge* *Kǒngzǐ* <(one)-CL-Confucius> is equivalent to *Kǒngzǐ zhème ge rén* <Confucius-such-CL-man> ‘a man like Confucius’. There is a striking similarity of means between Chinese and Western languages. In French, *un Corneille* is understood as ‘someone like Corneille, a playwright like Corneille’, that is, a person having the qualities characteristic of or peculiar to Corneille. In English, *a Shakespeare* is interpreted as ‘an author like Shakespeare’ (Quirk et al. 1974:160). Cf. also: ‘Do you consider yourself a Charles Dickens?’ With proper nouns, both the indefinite article in French or English and (*yī*) *ge* in Chinese, serve to bring out **quality**, not quantity. The exact semantic interpretation of the quality involved is, of course, a function of the context.

Quirk et al. (1974:160) indicate that proper names can be reclassified as common nouns, in which case they assume the characteristics of count nouns, in particular, take articles and plural number. Grevisse (1975:294) observes that, when the indefinite article is employed with proper nouns, it either expresses emphasis or transforms a proper name into a sort of common noun. He also remarks that the indefinite article may produce a similar effect in front of a common noun, underscoring the essential or typical qualities of the person or thing referred to. For example: *Quoi, Seigneur! sans l’ouïr [vous la faites emprisonner]? Une mère?* ‘What, my Lord! Without hearing her [you put her in jail]? A mother?’ (Racine, *Britannicus*, III, 6)

There is no need to go back to Racine, in contemporary French, too, it is possible to say: *Elle a perdu un père (un mari, un fils)* ‘She lost a

11) Cf. also Grootaers’ (1953/54:43-44) gloss on example (24) above: ‘(Other people may die, nobody says anything, but when my brother died, they all say :) that such a good man should die!’

father (a husband, a son)'. The emphasis is on what a father (a husband, a son) represents for her, and not at all on number (counting). Note that the sentence is about a specific person (her father, etc.), not about an interchangeable element of a class.

Riegel et al. (2009:319) give an interesting example in which a proper name modified by the indefinite article refers to the person named, previously identified and perfectly known in the context, and not to some other person sharing similar qualities: *La poétique des ruines devait être illustrée par un Chateaubriand* (i.e. a writer having exactly the same characteristics as him, that is, actually, Chateaubriand himself). Here, *un Chateaubriand* refers to Chateaubriand. The class has only one member, Chateaubriand himself!

For the sake of simplicity, consider the referent of a given proper noun, say, Chateaubriand. The class is defined by stating the property (properties) that all its members must satisfy, in this case, the characteristics of Chateaubriand. The defining property of the class here is 'to be Chateaubriand', i.e. 'Chateaubriandness'. Chateaubriand is taken as a qualitative prototype, 'Chateaubriandness' is thus a prototypical quality. Note that the defining property may be taken strictly or broadly, either **identical** or **similar** (i.e. comparable) to the qualities that uniquely determine Chateaubriand. In the first case, only one occurrence satisfies the definition, Chateaubriand himself. The class is a singleton, containing one member. That's what we have in the example above, *un Chateaubriand* refers in the context to Chateaubriand himself, which results in the emphasis on the quality 'to be Chateaubriand'. The defining property of the class, i.e. Chateaubriandness (noted p), coincides with that of the prototype Chateaubriand (the entity identified in the situation of utterance), this can be written as $p = p$, and corresponds to the intensification of the quality p .

In the second case, when the property is taken in the broad sense as being similar or comparable to those of the prototype, the class has more than one member, the persons considered as being like Chateaubriand in some respects. This case corresponds to what Quirk et al. (1974:160) call 'reclassification', when proper nouns are treated as common nouns.

It is thus possible to refer to Chateaubriand by means of *un Chateaubriand* (cf. Riegel et al. 2009:319). In this sentence, *un Chateaubriand* and *Chateaubriand* refer to a single entity, they are coreferential. It fol-

lows that a member of the class defined by the property ‘Chateaubriand’, noted p , is identical to a specific, previously identified person Chateaubriand (possessing the quality ‘Chateaubriand’), hence $p = p$, which amounts to enhancing the quality p , that is, to what is known as ‘high degree’. Note that qualitative intensification has great affinity with exclamatives. Indeed, Culioli (1999:125-134) has shown that exclamatives and ‘high degree’ are closely related. That’s exactly what we observe in the intransitive $b\tilde{a}$ sentences with $(y\bar{i})$ *ge* modifying a proper noun (or a common noun referring to something perfectly identified in the context), namely emphasis on quality as well as exclamative mood.¹²⁾

4.2. Quantification as a Dynamic Chain of Operations

Following Culioli (1989, 1990) and Ijic (1994), the term ‘quantification’ is used in a technical sense, as referring to a chain of operations of determination (individuation). Theoretical foundations of a cognition- and discourse-based theory of quantification were laid by Culioli in the eighties and early nineties. The central problem is that of progressive determination or individuation. How are one or more individual occurrences, situated in space-time, eventually constructed from the notion? The notion, which boils down to a complex of physical and cultural properties, corresponds to a qualitative continuum. The question is how does one go from pure quality to existential uniqueness, in other words, from intension (essence) to extension (existence)?

In order to quantify what is initially a quality we need to render it quantifiable. This is the task of *quantifiabilization*. The term was coined by Culioli (1989) to describe the operation that makes it possible to pass from quality (QLT) to quantity (QNT). Quantifiabilization therefore compounds QNT and QLT. It consists either in the construction of a class of abstract (interchangeable) occurrences or in a qualitative subcategorization (e.g. an ‘exotic’ beauty). This operation is not confined to a specific language but is universal. Of course, de-

12) For exclamatives and ‘high degree’ (qualitative enhancement), see Culioli (1990: 122, 198-201 and 1999:125-134). For a systematic presentation of the operations of quantification (individuation), see Culioli (1989, 1990) and Ijic (1994). For definiteness and indefiniteness, see also Strawson 1950 and Haspelmath 1997.

pending on the language, it corresponds to different realizations on the surface, including the absence of any marker at all. What is remarkable about Chinese is that it is made explicit in the form of classifiers whenever there is a question of counting. A classifier represents an interchangeable abstract occurrence (i.e. unit), which enables one to extract from a given notion a certain number of distinguished, that is, concrete, occurrences.¹³⁾ *Extraction* thus amounts to singling out one or more occurrences of a notion. It ascribes an existential status (real or imaginary) to one or more situationally anchored occurrences. It gives prominence to QNT. Given an extracted occurrence of a notion *p*, another occurrence of *p* may be posited. If the second occurrence is identified with the former one, we are dealing with *re-identification* (pinpointing), closely related to definiteness. Reidentification emphasizes QLT (Culioli 1989:100-101, 1990:181-182).

The concept of reidentification echoes Strawson's (1950:342) observation on the commonest use of the definite article *the* in English¹⁴⁾: 'We use *the* either when a previous reference has been made, and when *the* signals that the same reference is being made; or when, in the absence of a previous indefinite reference, the context (including the hearer's assumed knowledge) is expected to enable the hearer to tell *what* reference is being made.' Clearly, for Strawson, the determination of the noun is a process that follows a certain order in which at each stage it is assumed that the preceding stage has been passed. He thus talks (1950:332) about implication of existence regarding the aforementioned usage of *the*. Cf. also Huddleston (2000:250).¹⁵⁾ For a general discussion of cognitive linguistics, see Langacker

13) Note that the reduplication of the classifier has a distributive meaning. It provides an illustration of yet another operation of quantification, namely *scanning*. Scanning is defined as running over the whole domain without being willing or able to pick out one (or more) distinguished value(s). It is to be compared with Frege's (1893:7-8, 6-18) concept of *Werthverlauf*. For example:

Tiáo tiáo dào lù tōng Luómǎ.

<CL-CL-road-communicate-Rome>

'All roads (i.e. every road) lead to Rome.'

14) The other being the generic use of the definite article, as in *The whale is a mammal*, quoted by Strawson (1950:320). In this case, the underlying operation is scanning, with emphasis on the qualitative aspect (as opposed to the quantitative aspect – fragmentation into occurrences – exemplified by *every* above). Note that in the corresponding Chinese sentence this generic meaning will be rendered by a bare noun: *Jīngyú shì bǐrú dòngwù* <whale-be-mammal>. Cf. also Huddleston's (2000:255) 'genericness': *The leopard has a dark-spotted yellowish-fawn coat.*

(1987, 1991), as well as Croft & Cruse (2004).

5. Explaining Model Effects

5.1. Emphatic Value

Let us return to Chinese examples. In example (3), cited by Chao (1968:344), the woman lost so important a person as a spouse. Likewise, in example (18), taken from *Lǎo Cán yóu jì* and quoted by Lü (1984:194), the father who lost such a beloved person as an eldest son, transferred all his affection to the youngest. In both cases, the context shows clearly that the accent is on the quality denoted by the noun.

This effect is due to the presence of *ge*. (*Yī*) *ge* refers to an occurrence extracted from a class of occurrences. Given the presence of *bǎ*, which presupposes existence, the occurrence in question is situationally anchored (posited existentially). *Ge zhàngfu* may be interpreted as ‘such a man as a husband’, in reference to ‘her husband’. It is because *ge* implies the construction of a class defined by a certain property (properties) that it can bring out the qualitative aspect. The members of the class are quantitatively separable but qualitatively indistinguishable. In the present case, the defining property which characterizes the elements in the class is ‘(to) be a husband.’ Building a class out of a noun with unique reference (a proper name or a definite noun) amounts to highlighting the defining property of the class, i.e. the quality that sets it apart from all the others. It is a differential or contrastive quality.

This ‘emphatic’ value of the classifier *ge* is not limited to *bǎ* sentences with an intransitive verb. Of course, it is more conspicuous in the case of nouns with unique reference, especially proper names. It is more noticeable in *Tā bǎ ge zhàngfu sǐ-le* ‘She lost her husband’ than in *Tā bǎ ge píbāo diū-le* ‘He lost his wallet’, although, according to

15) Huddleston (2000:250) notes that in the sentence *A man and a woman got on the bus; the man was carrying a heavy suitcase* the relationship is the elementary one of identity. The referent of *the man* will be understood as the man introduced in the first clause by the indefinite *a man*. The speaker relies on the context, we have uniqueness relative to the context of discourse.

Chao (1968), in both sentences the classifier carries the same connotation. By emphasizing quality ('a thing such as this'), it stresses the 'preciousness' of the entity affected by the action of the verb (the patient). If the intrinsic importance is not evident, the sentence may be rejected (out of context) just because the thing is not deemed 'valuable' enough. Compare :

- (51) ? *Nǐ zěnmē bǎ ge gāngbǐ diū-le?*
 <you-how-BA-GE-pen-lose-VS>
 'How come you lost (such an object as) a pen?' [about a particular pen]
- (52) *Nǐ zěnmē bǎ ge zuànshí diū-le?*
 <you-how-BA-GE-diamond-lose-VS>
 'How come you lost (such a precious thing as) a diamond?
 [about a given diamond]

Pens are easily mislaid or lost, whereas we usually take great care of diamonds. Zhu Dexi (personal communication) proposed two contexts in which (51) becomes acceptable : (i) referring to a pen of which one is particularly fond ('That you should lose such a pen!'), (ii) when a pen is urgently needed ('That you should lose such a thing as a pen!'). Another native speaker explained that in example (2), the wallet must have contained important papers or a lot of money...

Chao (1968:344) contrasted (2) with (53) :

- (2) *Tā bǎ ge píbāo diū-le.*
 <he-BA-GE-wallet-lose-VS>
 'He has lost **his** wallet.' ['That he should lose a wallet like this!']
- (53) *Tā diū-le ge píbāo.*
 <he-lose-VS-GE-wallet>
 'He has lost **a** wallet.'

5.2. Implication of the Subject

By normally presupposing an agentive relationship between *tā* 'he'

and *pībāo* ‘wallet’, *bǎ* imputes the responsibility for the loss of the wallet to the subject. We are dealing here with a ‘neutralized’ or ‘disabled’ agentivity (through lack of vigilance, etc.). The subject does nothing to prevent something detrimental from happening.

In postverbal position, the classifier *ge* modifying a common noun is generally indefinite, in which case the spotlight is on quantity. In preverbal position, in the *bǎ* noun phrase referring to a situationally posited and identified entity (definite reference), *ge* highlights quality. That is, it underlines what a given object (e.g. a specific wallet) represents qualitatively.

Consider the following :

- (54) *Tā bǎ ge zéi pǎo-le.*
 <he-BA-GE-thief/burglar-escape/flee-VS>
 ‘That he should allow the burglar to escape!’ / ‘He let **his** prisoner escape.’
 [such a criminal!] (compare with ex. 4 above)

Zhu Dexi, to whom the example was presented, found it acceptable on one condition : that *tā* ‘he’ refers to a policeman, ‘otherwise the matter does not concern him’. This remark is most illuminating as to the responsibility of *tā*. The subject is supposed to have authority over or responsibility for the referent of the *bǎ* noun phrase but, nonetheless, lets him do something that defies that authority and gets out of control. In this case, the policeman was in charge of the prisoner but let him escape (loss of control).

By the same token, in the sentence below the subject is in some sense held ‘responsible’ for letting the sheep wander away (since he was in charge of the sheep):

- (55) *Tā bǎ ge yáng pǎo-le.*
 <he-BA-GE-sheep-run away-VS>
 ‘That he should let the sheep run away!’ / ‘He let the sheep run away.’
 [such an animal as a sheep! such a precious animal! (emphasis on quality)]¹⁶⁾

16) Compare with :
Bǎ ge zhū pǎo-le.

If one could speak to him, the comment would be: ‘You should have been more watchful!’

As Zhu Dexi pointed out, this sentence does not necessarily imply that there is only one animal, there might be several sheep in the context. What matters is not that one, two or more sheep strayed away, but that **such** an animal should run away (be lost). This is consistent with the fact that the focus is on quality and not on quantity. After all, one is not supposed to let a sheep wander away without doing anything! It is *ge* that makes the qualitative aspect stand out. Note that substituting $(yī) zhī$ <(one)-CL> or *liǎng zhī* <two-CL>, $(yī) tóu$ <(one)-CL> or *liǎng tóu* <two-CL> for *ge* yields a definite numerical value, namely ‘one (a given) sheep [**the** one]’, ‘**the** two sheep’.

5.3. Subject as a Locator

After careful scrutiny of the examples, it appears that there is some kind of underlying causal relationship between the subject of the sentence and the referent of the *bǎ* noun phrase (the patient). Only with the verb *sǐ* ‘die’ it seems that no such relation obtains.

The question then arises, what does an utterance such as (1) *Tā bǎ ge fùqin sǐ-le* mean exactly? What are the respective contributions of *bǎ* and *ge* to the overall meaning? And what is the role of the grammatical subject *tā*?

- (i) As noted above, *ge* lays emphasis on quality: the father **insofar as he is a father**, in other words, it highlights the property ‘be a father’.
- (ii) As in all other cases, *bǎ* signals the **patient** or ‘goal’, namely the entity which is affected by the action of the verb. Accordingly, the one who is ‘acted upon’ (i.e. affected by death) is the father. Something – old age, a disease, an accident, etc. – caused him to die, that is, brought him into the state of ‘being dead’. *Fùqin* ‘father’, the subject of the intransitive verb *sǐ* ‘die’, is presented here as an ‘object’ handled, manipulated or dealt with, in a word, disposed of (cf. ‘disposal’ form).

<BA-GE-pig-run away/escape-VS>

‘That the pig should (be allowed to) run away!’

[such an animal as a pig! (emphasis on quality)]

- (iii) What about *tā*? In the intransitive *bā* construction, the relationship between the subject of the sentence and the referent of the *bā* noun phrase is not agentive, but one of location. The grammatical subject is the locator or experiencer (not the doer), and the referent of the *bā* noun phrase the locatum. In contrast to the transitive *bā* construction, which is agentive (the subject is the agent), the relationship of location in the intransitive *bā* construction may be construed as a sort of ‘thwarted agentivity’: the subject **cannot** prevent something ‘harmful’ from happening. Unlike the agent, the locator (grammatical subject) is interpreted as ‘powerless’ (loss of_control).

Semantics plays a central role (Recanati 2004). We have, in fact, two superposed semantic relationships, agentivity (agent-patient) and location (locator-locatum). The referent of the *bā* noun participates in both. It is the **pivotal element** in this complex structure: at the same time the locatum (relative to the subject of the sentence *tā*, the locator/experiencer) and specified as the patient by means of *bā*. Note that the agent is left unexpressed (the hidden agent). In view of all this, the locator, occupying the position of grammatical subject, is considered as powerless (the non-agent). In conclusion, *tā* is essentially the locator. There is, however, agentivity at work, since the *bā* noun is explicitly marked as being the patient. The analysis in terms of composition of two relationships forming one complex relationship allows us to unify and account for all the uses of the intransitive *bā* construction.

The ‘powerlessness’ of the subject is interpreted as ‘something **deprived** him of (a man such as) his father. As for the verb *sī* ‘to die’, the fact that the referent of the *bā* noun (*fuqin*) is located relative to the subject of the sentence (*tā*), who is not the agent, suggests nevertheless some kind of implication of the subject in what happened to the father. We are all deeply involved in the death of near relatives and loved ones, and yet powerless.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, in this type of construction the subject has no control

over the action affecting the referent of the *bǎ* noun. Contrary to what is the case in the standard transitive *bǎ* sentences, s/he is not the agent, hence the connotation of powerlessness. With respect to the subject (the speaker), the result of the action amounts to the loss of sb/sth (deprivation, dispossession). The modal meaning produced is one of detrimentality and contrariness. In a way one regrets that one hasn't been able to do anything to prevent such a thing happening. Far from being contradictory, in this construction *bǎ* and *ge* have an affinity for each other. *Bǎ* in conjunction with the intransitive verb conveys the meaning of loss and powerlessness, while *ge* highlights the importance of the loss (intensification of the quality N).

This is a contribution to the central linguistic question of quantification and how it can be formally accounted for. It suggests that the indefinite quantification of nouns referring to unique entities serves to highlight the qualitative aspect, and that it is universally applicable. Cross-linguistic studies are of course critical for determining whether the phenomenon is a local or a global one.

I hope that this investigation will stimulate future work on the topic related to languages of the same area. The quantity of cross-linguistic data and the inclusion of data from less familiar languages are crucial both for the theory of quantification and for linguistic typology.

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