

# Diachronic Study on the Subjectification of the Verb-directional Construction “V 过-V guò-V (to) pass” in Chinese

Chunhua Wang

Beihang University, [chunhuagracewang@qq.com](mailto:chunhuagracewang@qq.com)

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**Theoretical background & research target** – The term “subjectification” refers to “a pragmatic - semantic process whereby ‘meanings become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude toward the proposition, in other words, towards what the speaker is talking about’ (Traugott 1989:35, 1995: 31). The grammaticalization of the main verb “过 - guò – to pass” (“guò” henceforth) (Mu 1989) allows the combination between the verb and the complement “guò”, forming the construction “V 过-V guò-V (to) pass” (“V guò” henceforth) with the form [V + guò], in which “guò” can be a verb-directional complement, resultative complement and an aspect particle. Existing research on the diachronic change of the construction “V guò” has unearthed rich insights on the subjectification of the main verb “guò” as a resultative complement and an aspect particle (Zi 2008; Rao 2017; Kong 1986, 1995; Shen 2001). However, there have been few attempts to systematically investigate the subjectification of the verb-directional construction “V guò”. And the existing analyses have not provided convincing evidence for the relationship between the grammaticalization and the subjectification from a macro-event (Li 2018) perspective, even though the verb-directional construction “V guò” shows obvious features of event integration (Talmy 2000). This study is an attempt at bridging this gap by proposing a corpus-based diachronic analysis of the subjectification of the verb-directional construction “V guò” in Chinese, as exemplified in (1-2), and the cognitive motivations correlated to grammaticalization of the main verb “guò” in Chinese.

(1) 有仙人行经过穴。(Six Dynasties: Baopuzi)

yǒu xiānrén xíngjīngguò xué  
Have immortals walked and GUO the cave  
'Immortal passing through the cave'

(2) 赛过祇园舍卫。(Ming Dynasty: Journey to the West)

sàiguò zhīyuán shěwèi  
Surpassing GUO Gion Shiva  
'Better than Gion Shiva'

## **Research questions**

1) Whether the verb-directional construction “V guò” in Chinese has undergone a process of subjectification based on the three tendencies proposed by Traugott? And whether this construction can be considered as an epistemic marker?

2) how the grammaticalization of the main verb “guò” correlate to the subjectification of the verb-directional construction “V guò”? And what is the advantage of bringing the theory of event integration and macro-event hypothesis into this study?

## **Data & method -**

Our dataset was extracted from the historical CCL Corpus (Center for Chinese Linguistics from Peking University). Regarding the turning point of the verb-directional construction “V guò”, we divide the whole process into 4 stages. As demonstrated in Figure 1, 404 occurrences of the verb-directional construction “V guò” were collected. We will firstly report the subjectivity of the verb-directional construction “V guò” in the four stages respectively, and then use the three tendencies proposed by Traugott (1989, 1995) to analyze its subjectification. Here, the three tendencies in the subjectification of some expressions, listed as follows:

Tendency I: Meanings based in the external described situation > meanings based in the internal (evaluative/perceptual/cognitive) described situation.

Tendency II: Meanings based in the external or internal described situation > meanings based in the textual and metalinguistic situation.

Tendency III: Meanings tend to become increasingly based in the speaker's subjective belief state/attitude toward the proposition.

(Traugott 1989: 34-35)

And the macro-event hypothesis will be used to gauge the cognitive motivation inside the subjectification of the verb-directional construction “V guò”.

		Han & Six Dynasties	Tang & Five Dynasties	Song Dynasty	Yuan & Ming & Qing Dynasties
Directional meanings	To cross/to approach	13	26	34	91
	Agent to move or chang direction by himself	1	0	5	31
	Patient made to change position or direction	0	7	32	77
Extended meanings	To spend	0	8	19	25
	To outreach proper point or location	0	8	12	2
	To surpass by competition, etc.	0	5	1	7
Total occurrences		14	54	103	233

Figure 1: The meanings of the directional construction “V 过-V guò-V (to) pass”

#### **Preliminary findings -**

We find that: (1) the verb-directional construction “V guò” underwent subjectification but has not developed into an epistemic marker. (2) Its subjectification is closely tied with the grammaticalization of the main verb “guò”. By bringing the macro-event hypothesis into this study, this article provides a new perspective for the study of the subjectification of the verb-directional construction “V guò”, bridging between the grammaticalization and the subjectification by indicating the shift of [PATH] in the motion event.

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