

## Letting and getting in the making : on the syntax and semantics of *rang*

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**The issue.** In Mandarin, the V *rang* appears in constructions that yield distinct interpretations. When the subject has the semantic role of Causer, *rang* has a *causative* meaning and can be interpreted either as (i) *let* or (ii) *make* (1a). When the subject is interpreted as an Experiencer or an Undergoer, *rang* is interpreted as *get* (1b). In fact, under the *affected* interpretation (1b), *rang* can alternate with the pseudo-passive marker *bei* in *long passive* constructions (2). The analogy with *bei* is only partial, however, as contrary to *bei*, *rang* cannot be used in so-called *short passive* constructions (3).

(1) Zhangsan *rang* Lisi *nazou-le liang ben shu* (Hu, 2017, p. 298)

Zhangsan RANG Lisi take-away-ASP two CL book

a. CAUSATIVE: Zhangsan let / made Lisi take away two books

b. AFFECTED: Zhangsan got two of his books stolen by Lisi

(2) Zhangsan *bei/rang* Lisi *nazou-le liang ben shu*

Zhangsan BEI RANG Lisi take-away-ASP two CL book

(3) Zhangsan *bei/\*rang* *nazou-le liang ben shu*

Zhangsan BEI RANG take-away two CL book

a. AFFECTED: Zhangsan got two of his books stolen by Lisi

b. # CAUSATIVE: Zhangsan let/made Lisi take away two books

This structural similarity between passives and causatives has been noticed cross-linguistically, and raises the issue of (i) whether a relation of syntactic derivation between two structures could be maintained in Mandarin, and (ii) what is the role played by the semantics of *rang* in allowing both interpretations. In this talk, we argue that passive-causative *rang* is a light-*v* whose distribution and interpretation are determined both by semantic and syntactic factors. Like many (semi)functional items in Chinese, *rang* also has a counterpart with full lexical meaning: lexical V *rang* means “yield, concede” and it functions essentially as a ditransitive V (Weng 2007). We speculate that the original meaning of *rang* is what characterizes its incompatibility with short passives as well as its semantics as a semi-lexical *v* in causative constructions. **Syntax** In line with previous work (Huang et al. 2009), we argue that the causative and passive constructions cannot be analyzed as derived from one another. We propose that causatives and short passives are, respectively, object and subject control constructions (inspired by Paul 2021), while in long passives the composition of the two clauses is obtained via the abstraction of the argument of the embedded verb and the attribution of the unsaturated predicate to the subject of *rang* (cf. Huang et al 2009). In all the constructions, *rang* is analyzed as a light-*v*.

**Semantics** The ambiguity between *let/make* interpretations is observed in causative Vs across languages. In Lauer & Nadathur (2018)’s proposed causal model, inspired by Schulz (2011), German *lassen* (4) is analysed as a sufficiency causative MAKE-V whose *make/let* interpretation depends on the evaluation of a background situation, i.e. on whether the tendency of the Causee is considered relevant for the obtention of the final event.

(4) *Hans hat die Kinder tanzen lassen.* → a. LET: Hans let the children dance. (Pitteroff 2014)

Hans has the children dance LASSEN → b. MAKE: Hans made the children dance.

We follow Lauer & Nadathur in analysing *rang* as a causative verb, but explain its interpretation in a different way. Following its original semantics as a lexical V, we analyse *rang* as a causative LET-V. LET-Vs have the specific semantics of *double-prevention verbs* (Wolff&Thorsdat 2016, Raffy 2021). A sentence like (4) conveys the meaning that Hans may prevent the children from dancing, but he does not exert this prevention (he *prevents* the prevention from applying). In a force-dynamic framework, the relation that Causers have with events is thus an absence of action: the participant responsible for the [[VP]] to occur is the Causee. This is shown by the inferential patterns that *rang* shares with causative LET-Vs: contrary to MAKE-causatives, the action of the Causer alone does not ensure that the [[VP]] has occurred (5a). Also, contrary to causative Vs implying a request or a coercion, the Causer may be indifferent or non-committed to the occurrence of the event; in the latter case, the inference must be that the event has already started (5b).

(5a) *menwei rang Li jinqu (dan Li haishi liu le zai menwai)*

(5b) *menwei wuyizhong rang Li jinqu (#dan Li haishi liu le zai menwai)*  
gatekeeper (unintentionally) RANG Li enter but Li then stay ASP at door-out

The doorman (unintentionally) let Li enter, but Li stayed outside instead

We elaborate on Lauer & Nadathur (2018)’s model and propose a configuration where the difference in interpretation does not depend on the consideration of the tendency of the Causee, but rather on the Causer’s involvement. Based on this formal model, we show that it is possible to develop diagnostics such as those in (5) and (6) that allow us to predict the interpretation of *rang* in a systematic and semantically-grounded way.

## References

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