

THE FORMATION OF THE COPULA FUNCTION OF *WEI* 为 AND THE NATURE OF THE “*WEI* 为 V” CONSTRUCTION


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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explain the development of the copula function of *wei* 为 and to show that *wei* in the “*wei* V” construction is a *copula* during pre-Han times, rather than a passive marker. Therefore, in essence, the “*wei* V” construction is a copula construction rather than a passive construction. In this analysis, we pay special attention to the “*yi* 以 X *wei* 为 Y” construction and draw the following conclusions: (1) the generalized copula function of *wei* derives from the “*yi* X *wei* Y” construction because of the disposal function of *yi*, and because *wei* absorbed the characteristics of the “*yi* X *wei* Y” construction. This conclusion is based on the observation that the unique features of *wei* as a copula are congruent with its function in the “*yi* X *wei* Y” construction, and that the change from “V *yi wei*” to “V *wei*” indicates that *wei* replaced “*yi wei*” to a certain degree. (2) “X *wei* V” is an

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alternative pattern of “*yi X wei V*” when a causer (C) does not appear in the same clause with *wei*. These observations are supported by the fact that “*yi X wei V*” and “*X wei V*” have the same (low) frequency, and are both very limited in their semantic range, and that their exchangeability does not have any influence on their semantics. (3) “*Wei A V*” is formed through the omission of *yi* in the “*yi X wei A V*” or, alternatively, through the addition of the agent A in “*wei V*”, whereas “*wei A (zhi) suo V*” is the consequence of “*A (zhi) suo V*” replacing “*A V*” in “*wei A V*”. Therefore, none of the *wei* constructions in pre-Qin should be regarded as syntactically functioning as passive constructions. Rather, “*wei A suo V*” became a common passive construction only in the Han dynasty.

KEYWORDS

Copula construction Passive construction “*Yi* 以 *X wei* 为 *Y*” disposal construction *Wei* 为 *V*

1. INTRODUCTION

The function of *wei*¹ in pre-Han Chinese remains a topic of intense debate in Chinese linguistic studies. As early as in the 1930s, Wang (1937, 15) argued that *wei* is not a true copula because it functions as such only on rare occasions, while in most cases it functions as a kind of copula based on its verbal features.² Twenty years later, Hong (2000, 30–31) insisted that both *wei* 为 and *shi* 是 are true copulas. Finally, Yu (2005, 106), adopting an intermediary position, concluded that *wei* was a verb that was in the process of becoming a copula, so it functioned as such to some degree. Generally, *wei* is treated as a “special” copula by most scholars (sometimes referred to as “semi-copula” or “quasi-copula”). However, the question of the special features of *wei* needs further study. More importantly, *wei*’s development into a special copula remains something of a mystery. Wang (1937, 9) concluded that it is difficult to determine precisely how this process occurred in a diachronic perspective since all of its functions appeared at a very early stage. In this paper, we will address both the formation of the copula function of *wei* and the special features of *wei*.

As for the term “copula”, Peyraube and Wiebusch (1994, 383) have provided a useful definition in the Chinese context: “For Chinese, we

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“为”系词功能的形成和“为V”结构的性质

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摘要

文章分析了“为”字功能的形成过程，并证明“为V”结构中的“为”应释为系词，而非被动标记。因此，“为V”结构本质上是系词结构而非被动结构。本文从分析“以X为Y”结构出发，得出以下结论：(1) “为”的系词功能来自于“以X为Y”结构，因为“以”的处置功能，及“为”吸收了“以X为Y”结构的构式特征，其理据是“为”作为系词的功能特征和“以X为Y”的构式特征有高度的吻合性，而且存在“V以为”省略为“V为”的明显发展趋势。(2) 当致使者不和“为”共现于同一个从句时，“X为V”是“以X为V”的可替换项，理据是二者的使用频率均较低，语义范围均非常有限，而且二者具有可互换性。(3) “为AV”可能是“以X为AV”省略“以”而成，或者由“为V”添加A而成，而“为A(之)所V”则是“A(之)所V”替代“为AV”中的“AV”而成。因此，先秦时期的“为”字式，从句法上来说都不是被动式。“为A所V”在汉代成为了一个真正的被动式。

关键词

系词结构 被动结构 “以X为Y”处置结构 “为V”结构