

The Causative Constructions in Middle Chinese

Pei-chuan Wei

Institute of Linguistics, Academia Sinica

This paper discusses the four types of causative construction in Middle Chinese: type A, “V1 V2+ (NP)”, which is sometimes referred to as a “causative compound” or “compound causative”; type B, “V1+NP+V2”; type C, “*Shi* (*Ling*) + (NP) +V”; and type D, “V1+ (NP) +*Shi* (*Ling*) + (NP) +V2”. We examine the distribution and development of each type in detail, giving particular attention to the diachronic development of type A. We argue that the head of type A is V2 in Old Chinese and that this situation continued into Middle Chinese. The head later changes to V1 in Early Mandarin, a process which may have begun in Middle Chinese. The evidence for asserting that V2 is the head of type A comes from the fact that whether this construction can take an object depends entirely on the transitivity of V2. As for the factors which caused the reanalysis of type A, one possible explanation is the decline in the use of causative verbs and the corresponding increase in the use of causative constructions.

Keywords: causative construction, causative compound, ergative verb,
Middle Chinese, Old Chinese