Deviation of Transitivity in *Ba*-constructions from the Perspective of Mode and Speech Acts

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Ba-constructions carry high level of transitivity, but a deviation towards low transitivity happens. It is found that mode provides axis of this transitivity deviation, especially in spoken dialogue. Under the influence of irrealis mode, parameters such as aspects, affectedness of O, individuation of O, and affirmation exhibit different degrees of transitivity deviation. Speech acts, which is closely related to mode, are the driving force in discourse of this phenomenon. The composition rules of speech acts of directive, declarative, commitment, and emotive, which account for the majority of speech acts in spoken dialogue, determine that they are all irrealis. Therefore, under the axis of irrealis mode, several transitivity parameters of *ba*-constructions in oral dialogue deviates towards low transitivity. The phenomenon of deviation of transitivity in *ba*-constructions verifies transitivity hypothesis.

Keywords: ba-constructions, transitivity, speech acts, mode

Introduction

The syntactic semantics of Chinese *ba*-constructions have long been a focal point in academic research. Previous studies have explored it from various perspectives, including object extraction (Li, 1924; Chao, 1979), disposal (Wang, 1943; Song, 1979), resrult (Cui, 1995; Jin, 1997; Zhang, 2001), causation (Guo, 2003; Ye, 2004), and subjective disposal (Shen, 2002). These perspectives either emphasize affectedness of the object or focus on characteristics of the predicate. In addition to these specific angles, transitivity which is the overall discourse semantic feature of *ba*-constructions has also gained significant attention. *Ba*-constructions have been classified as high-transitivity constructions. For instance, Wang (1989) illustrates that compared with general subject clauses, passive constructions and patient subject clauses, *ba*-constructions occupy a position of high transitivity on the continuum, while Zhong (2017) has argued that the transitivity of *ba*-constructions surpasses that of double-object constructions.

Transitivity originates from Hopper and Thompson's (1980) transitivity hypothesis, which refers to the property of an action moving from one participant to another within a sentence. Each sentence exhibits varying degrees of transitivity. According to Hopper and Thompson (1980), ten parameters influence transitivity, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

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Table 1
Transitivity Parameters (Hopper & Thompson, 1980; Thompson & Hopper, 2001)

	High Transitivity	**Low Transitivity**
A. Participants	2 or more	1
B. Kinesis	action	non-action
C. Aspects	telic	atelic
D. Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual
E. Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional
F. Affirmation	affirmative	negative
G. Mode	realis	irrealis
H. Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency
I. Affectedness of O	O highly affected	O not affected
J. Individuation of O	O highly individuated	O not individuated

These ten parameters are co-variant, meaning if one of two clauses show higher transitivity in any parameter from A-J, then all other syntactic and semantic features will also indicate higher transitivity for one clause over the other (Hopper & Thompson, 1980).

According to transitivity hypothesis, *ba*-constructions generally exhibit high transitivity. However, not all instances of *ba*-constructions are highly transitive. Zhong (2017: 490) notes that some examples of *ba*-constructions display low transitivity. Even in cases where *ba*-constructions are considered highly transitive, certain parameters often display a tendency towards low transitivity. Among the ten parameters of transitivity, the mode parameter of *ba*-constructions does not demonstrate a tendency toward high transitivity (see Example (1)).

Example (1)

Wo bu **ba** ta baizai zhege defang dou duibuqi   ta le.[1]

I   no   it put   this   place   even feel sorry for   it

(I would even feel sorry for it if I didn't put it in this place.)

(From *The Poor*)

This example, cited by Zhong (2017), is both negative and hypothetical, indicating non-realis mode, which corresponds to low transitivity. However, in terms of other parameters, such as participant involvement, kinesis, affectedness of the object, and individuation of the object, the construction displays characteristics of high transitivity. This phenomenon appears to contradict the transitivity hypothesis and, so far, has remained unexplained.

We refer to this discrepancy as the deviation of transitivity in *ba*-constructions. What, then, are the causes of such deviation in the transitivity of *ba*-constructions? And what is its discourse motivation? Our analysis reveals that deviations in transitivity often occur in mode parameter, specifically in irrealis constructions, while these irrealis *ba*-constructions predominantly correspond to directive, commissive, declarative, and expressive speech acts. Therefore, mode and speech act categories could provide insightful explanation for the deviations of transitivity in *ba*-constructions.

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[1] In the examples presented in this paper, grammatical particles, modal particles, and certain adverbs—such as *le* (了), *a* (啊), and *dou* (都)—have been temporarily excluded from direct one-to-one translation due to the difficulty in identifying equivalent counterparts in the target language.

This paper will first examine the deviations across various transitivity parameters in *ba*-constructions. Then, it will focus on the axis role of mode parameter in these deviations. Finally, by analyzing the distribution of mode features across different speech act categories in *ba*-constructions, we aim to explore how discourse motivations rooted in speech acts may induce transitivity deviation in *ba*-constructions with mode as the central factor.

The scope of this study is limited to spoken dialogue *ba*-constructions. In order to collect authentic spoken language data, we employed audio-visual transcription methods to extract 334 instances of *ba*-constructions from the television drama *Let's Get Married* (《咱们结婚吧》). The plot of this drama closely mirrors real-life situations, and its dialogue is highly conversational, thereby approximating natural spoken discourse to a significant extent.

Deviations in Transitivity Parameters of *Ba*-constructions

The deviation of transitivity in *ba*-constructions can be decomposed into various parameters' low transitivity orientations. Although *ba*-constructions are characterized as high-transitivity sentence pattern, its transitivity parameters may deviate towards lower transitivity on the continuum under different conditions. There are ten parameters of transitivity (see Table 1). Some parameters within *ba*-constructions exhibit deviations from high transitivity, which will be introduced below.

(1) **Participants**: Following Hopper & Thompson (1980), if there are two or more participants involved, it indicates high transitivity; fewer than two indicates low transitivity. Due to the nature of *ba*-constructions, there are always two or more participants, thus no deviating from high transitivity in this parameter.

(2) **Kinesis**: This parameter is not discrete but continuous, with the category of actions influencing degree of transitivity. Ranging from physical activities (e.g., eat, walk, work) through dynamic processes (e.g., implement, transform, improve) to mental activities (e.g., think, forget, ponder), actions decrease in transitivity. Among these, mental activities have deviated from high transitivity. A few *ba*-constructions show such deviations, exemplified below.

Example (2)

> (Situation: Guo Ran's father leaves home, and his mother calls him back)
> Guoran's mother: Guoran, ni ke huilai le, ni shuo zenme neng zheyang? Ta zenme
> *you finally back   you say how could this way he how*
> keyi zheyang? Ta **ba** wo gei jisi le,   yaoburan wo buhui   jiao ni huilai.
> *could this way   he   I   drive crazy   otherwise I wouldn't   call you back*
> (Guoran, you're finally back. How could things be this way? How could he do such a thing? He has driven me crazy; otherwise, I wouldn't have called you back.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 3, 5'15'')

Predicates *jisi* (drive crazy) in Example (2) is mental activity, which indicate low actionality, leading to deviating from high transitivity.

(3) **Aspect**: Aspect typically considers telicity (boundedness) and atelicity (unboundedness), perfectivity and imperfectivity. The former concerns inherent endpoint of an action, including both time and space (Smith, 1991; Xiao & McEnery, 2004), while the latter involves characteristics of an action over time. We argue that

semantic transitivity and contextual transitivity should be extinguished. Boundedness indicates high transitivity in semantics, while perfectivity indicates contextual high transitivity, only with which being satisfied a high level of transitivity could be achieved. Otherwise, it represents a deviation towards lower transitivity, as illustrated below.

Example (3)

(Situation: Guoran resigns from his job)

Guoran's supervisor: Duile,   ni gen na Taozi daodi haoshang le meiyou?
by the way you and that   finally get together   not

（By the way, have you and that girl Taozi finally gotten together？）

Guoran: Dengdao wo chedi de quanfangwei de **ba** ta naxia le, zaowan   dei   guo
when   I   completely thoroughly   her win over eventually have to face

zanmen zhe guan.
our   this step

(I'll make my move only when I've completely and thoroughly won her over—and eventually, we'll have to face this step anyway.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 31, 07'40'')

In Example (3), although its predicate *ba ta naxia* (win her over) gains an endpoint in space through preposition *xia (*over) and in time through particle *le*, leading to semantic high transitivity, contextually it is imperfective because of its irrealis state, which results in its derivation from high trasitivity.

(4) **Punctuality**: Judged by whether a duration complement can be added to the predicate. If possible, it suggests non-punctual actions and a deviation from high transitivity. A duration complement could be added to predicate *ba ta na xia* to indicate its time duration in Example (3) above, which is an instance for deviation from high transitivity in parameter punctuality.

(5) **Volitionality**: Refers to the extent of intentional action by the agent (Hopper & Thompson, 1980). Utilizing Taylor's (1995) persuade framework, as Zhong (2017) did, if a *ba*-construction cannot fit into the structure X+persuade+ (NP+*ba*+O+VP), it deviates from high transitivity. In Example (2) above, it is hard for predicate *ta ba wo gei jisi* transform into ? *X persuade ta ba wo gei jisi*, so it deviates from high transitivity.

(6) **Affirmation**: Closely related to mode, affirmation aligns with high transitivity, whereas negation deviates (see Example (4)).

Example (4)

(Situation: Weiwei is upset because the treatment for her fallopian tube obstruction was not effective, and she comes to talk with Yangtao.)

Yangtao says to Weiwei: Yisheng zhishi shuo kenengxing buda, ta meiyou **ba** hua
doctor   only   say possibility   low   she no   words

shuosi a,   duibudui? Na jiu zhengming haiyou   keneng a, ni jiu yinggai
rule out completely   did she That   mean   there's still   hope   you just should

peihe yisheng,   jiji de   qu   zhiliao.
cooperate doctor,   actively undergo treatment

(The doctor only said that the possibility is low—she didn't rule it out completely, did she? That means there's still hope. You should cooperate with the doctor and undergo the treatment actively.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 36, 38'50'')

Example (4) is negative, deviating from high transitivity in parameter affirmation.

(7) **Mode**: Distinguished between realis and irrealis. Realis, usually including declaritave, indicates high transitivity, while irrealis, including negation, question, habit, possibility, ability, hypothesis, condition, wish, et.al, signifies deviation. Example (1), (3) and (4) above all show irrealis mode, indicating a deviation from high transitivity. Many *ba*-constructions exhibit deviations due to their irrealis forms, which is the most common reason for their deviations.

(8) **Agentivity**: According to Wang (1989), agentivity concerns the ability of an agent to control, initiate, and perform actions. A high level of agentivity imposes more effect on objects. Zhong (2017) attributes level of agentivity to degree of animation of agents, while we argue that to decide transitivity in this parameter, elements including agents, predicates, objects following *ba* and context should all be considered instead of merely focusing on the animacy of the subject (see Example (5))

Example (5)

> (Situation: Jiaoyang calls Mr. Sun to demand money but fails to reach an agreement; Yangtao advises Jiaoyang not to act impulsively)
> Yangtao: ni bie a, Jiao Yang, ni ke bie chongdong a, wo zhe qian manman yao ba, ni
> *you not   you   not act recklessly   my this money slowly   get back you*
> buyao yinwei zhege shiqing, jiu **ba** gongzuo gei diu le.
> *not   because of this matter   job   get lost*
> (Don't do it, Jiaoyang. Please don't act recklessly. Let me get my money back slowly. Don't let this matter cost you your job.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 9, 05'57'')

In Example (5), although subject *ni* (you) is animate, predicate *ba gongzuo diu le*(get job lost) is not a direct consequence resulted from action of *ni*, indicating a deviation of parameter agentivity from high transitivity.

(9) **Affectedness of the Object**: Requires distinguishing between semantic and contextual affectedness, a basis for looking into degree of affectedness. Even if semantically affected, objects in unrealized contexts do not achieve high transitivity, which makes parameter mode related. Example (3), (4) and (5) above are all irrealis mode, being unrealized. Although the object is affected semantically, the object following *ba* has not been affected in real context, which makes it deviate from high transitivity in parameter of affectedness of the object. More specifically, degree of affectedness of the object could be illustrated as two levels. If the affectedness of the object is of its own and referring to non-metaphorical state or property change and position transfer, it is of high transitivity. If it refers to metaphorical state, property change or position transfer, it deviates from high transitivity. In Example (3) above, *ba ta naxia (win her over)* could only be positional transferred by metaphor, resulting in affectedness of the object, but because it is neither state or property change nor position transfer of real things, it deviates from high transitivity in parameter of affectedness of the object. The same is also for Example (4) and (5).

(10) **Individuality of the Object**: A distinguishment between contextual and semantic transitivity also works for parameter of individuality of the object. Contextually, all objects of *ba*-constructions in corpus are

definite and possess high level of individuality. However, semantically, some objects appear as bare nouns, leading to deviations from high transitivity when compared to those with clear referents, though it might have clear referents in context. Bare noun *gongzuo* (job) in Example (5) above clearly refers to Jiao Yang's work in context, but compared with personal pronoun *ta* (she) in Example (4), it carries less degree of individuality, showing a deviation from high transitivity.

Mode and Transitivity Deviation of *Ba*-constructions

The transitivity parameter of mode represents the most significant deviation from high transitivity in *ba*-constructions. Many *ba*-constructions in spoken dialogue discourse exhibit irrealis (non-realistic) mode. Irrealis mode contrasts with realis mode, while realis mode describes events that have occurred or are occurring in real world, and irrealis mode refers to situations that have not occurred in reality but exist only in imagination, potentially occurring or hypothetically happening (Comrie, 1985; Chafe, 1995; Palmer, 2001). Negation, interrogation, habitual actions, possibility, ability, hypothesis, conditionality, and optative expressions all belong to non-realistic mode (Hopper & Thompson, 1980; Zhang, 2012; Zhou, 2015; Zhong, 2017). Statistical analysis of the collected corpus reveals the following distribution of mode in *ba*-constructions within spoken dialogue discourse.

Table 2
Statistical Analysis of Mode in Ba-constructions in Spoken Dialogue Discourse

	Quantity	Proportion
Realis mode	110	32.9%
Irrealis mode	224	67.1%

From Table 2, we conclude that in spoken conversational discourse, *ba*-constructions predominantly express irrealis mode (more than two-thirds), outnumbering their use in expressing realis mode. All *ba*-constructions in irrealis modes exhibit deviations from transitivity, and these deviations are closely related to other parameters of transitivity. Using mode as a reference point for comparing deviations in other parameters can effectively reflect the role of mode in transitivity deviations within *ba*-constructions. Table 3 presents a comparison of deviations in other transitivity parameters between realis and irrealis mode by using mode as a reference point and applying various deviation criteria.

Table 3
Deviation of Transitivity Parameters in Realis and Irrealis Mode Ba-constructions

	Realis		Irrealis	
Parameters	Deviation Count	Proportion	Deviation Count	Proportion
Participants	0	0%	0	0%
Kinesis	7	6.4%	15	6.7%
Aspect	1	0.9%	213	95.1%
Punctuality	4	3.6%	13	5.8%
Volitionality	13	11.8%	11	4.9%
Affirmation	0	0%	50	22.3%
Mode	0	0%	224	100%
Agency	8	7.3%	14	6.3%
Affectedness of O	9	8.2%	207	92.4%
Individuation of O	17	15.5%	68	30.4%

According to Table 3, the quantity and proportion of deviations in transitivity parameters are significantly higher in irrealis mode *ba*-constructions compared to those in realis mode ones. Among irrealis mode *ba*-constructions, aspect and object affectedness exhibit larger degree of deviation. Transitivity deviations of these two parameters are closely related to mode, mainly because irrealis mode often imply uncompleted actions and unaffected objects within context. Transitivity deviations in mode, aspect, and object affectedness also influence other parameters, most notably object individuality and affirmation. In contrast to irrealis mode *ba*-constructions, deviations in realis mode *ba*-constructions are less pronounced. On parameters of mode, aspect, and object affectedness where irrealis mode shows strong deviations, realis mode exhibits low or zero rates of deviation. Although the deviation rates for volitionality and agency parameters are slightly higher in realis mode than in irrealis mode, overall, deviations in realis mode remain within normal ranges without reaching the extreme deviations observed in irrealis mode and their subsequent impact on other parameters.

This analysis indicates that mode plays a pivotal role in transitivity deviations of *ba*-constructions, influencing other related parameters. What then drives the transitivity deviations in mode? As shown in Table 2, *ba*-constructions are predominantly used to express non-realistic mode. Further analysis reveals that non-realistic mode *ba*-constructions are frequently employed to denote speech acts such as instructions, promises, and declarations. Consequently, this phenomenon is closely associated with the types of speech acts found in spoken dialogue discourse involving *ba*-constructions.

Discourse Motivation: Speech Acts

The founder of Speech Act Theory is J. Austin (1962), and Searle (1979) inherited and further developed Austin's theory. According to four constitutive rules—essential conditions, sincerity conditions, preparatory conditions, and propositional conditions[2]—speech acts are categorized into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, declarations, and expressives. Based on Searle's (1979) classification system of speech acts, distribution of speech acts in *ba*-constructions in corpus is as follows.

Table 4
Distribution of Speech Acts of Ba-constructions in Spoken Dialogues

Speech Act Category	Number of *Ba*-constructions	Proportion
Assertive	142	42.5%
Declaration	140	42.0%
Directive	25	7.5%
Commissive	21	6.3%
Expressive	6	1.8%

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[2] According to the four constitutive rules, the felicity conditions for **assertive speech acts i**nclude: the speaker guarantees the truth of the proposition, believes the proposition to be true, and makes an effort to align words with the world. For **directive speech acts**, the conditions are: the speaker attempts to get the hearer to perform a certain action, requires the hearer to take action, and strives to align the world with words, specifically through future actions. In the case of **commissive speech acts**, the speaker commits to performing a specific action in the future, intends to carry it out, and endeavors to bring the world into alignment with words, again referring to future actions. The **declarative speech acts** are characterized by the speaker's intention to alter the external conditions of an object or situation, without expressing any internal psychological state; such acts may involve either aligning words with the world or aligning the world with words. Finally, the **expressive speech acts** involve the speaker conveying a particular psychological state, reflecting an attitude toward the hearer, assuming that words correspond to the world, and providing a description of a particular state of affairs (Searle, 1979).

According to Table 4, *ba*-constructions in spoken dialogues are predominantly used for assertive and directive speech acts, which together account for over eighty percent of the total, with each type representing slightly more than forty percent. Following these are declaration, commissive, and expressive speech acts. The constitutive rules of directive, declarative, commissive, and expressive speech acts determine their irrealis mode nature. These four types of speech acts collectively account for nearly sixty percent of all *ba*-constructions in spoken dialogues. Moreover, not all assertive speech acts exhibit realis mode. Therefore, the prevalence of speech acts has led to a majority of irrealis mode constructions deviating from high transitivity in spoken *ba*-constructions, serving as a discourse-driven factor that causes deviations in transitivity parameter of *ba*-constructions. The following section will analyze the mode of different categories of speech acts.

Assertive *Ba*-Constructions and Mode

Assertive acts are speech acts performed by speakers to ensure the truthfulness of a proposition, striving to align words with reality. Examples include:

Example (6)

(Situation: Yang Tao calls Jiao Yang to talk about Guoran being scared away by her mother)

Jiao Yang: Na houlai ne?

then later

(What happened then?)

Yang Tao: Houlai ta jiu zhijie chulai le, ranhou shuo le sheng ayi hao, ranhou zhijie jiu

then he directly come out then say a auntie hello then straightly

chumen le, wo gen woma dou mei fanying guolai, ren dou kanbujian le, ni zhidao zui

go out. I and my mom. no react in time people be gone you know most

dou de shi ta **ba** wo nashuang nvshi tuoxie jiu gei chuanzou le, ni shuo ta zenme

fun is he my that pair of female slippers wear and walk off you say he how

shangde jie, zenme huide jia ya?

go on to street, how get home

(Then he came out directly, said hello auntie, and went straight out. Neither my mom nor I reacted in time; he was gone before we knew it. You know what's funniest? He walked off wearing my lady's slippers. How did he go on the street, how did he get home?) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 9, 1'7'')

Example (7)

(Situation: Guoran plans to take Yang Tao to meet his parents, but Yang Tao forgets her phone when she leaves)

Yang Tao's mother: Zhege buneng wang le, ma yao lianxi bushang ni, wo gen ni jiang,

this cannot forget mom if reach not you I to you say

neng **ba** wo jisi.

could I drive crazy

(You can't forget this. If I can't reach you, it will drive me crazy.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 31, 09'42'')

Examples (6) illustrates assertive *ba*-construction. It is a statement about event that has already occurred, meeting the four constitutive rules for identifying assertive acts. Specifically, Yang Tao states the fact that Guoran wore her slippers away. When she makes this statement, she guarantees the truthfulness of the proposition and believes the proposition to be true, striving to align her words with reality. Since her statement does not direct any action, it lacks propositional conditions. Thus, it is an assertive act. Example (7) is unique because it does not describe past events but rather a hypothetical or speculative future scenario. Zhao (2012) classifies such cases into a new category of speech act—inferring acts. However, we argue that Example (7) remains an assertive act, its uniqueness lying in its mode rather than its speech act nature, specifically in its hypothetical irrealis mode. In Example (7), Yang Tao's mother expresses her belief in the possibility of a future event. She ensures the truthfulness of the possibility proposition, even if it is hypothetical or speculative and may not occur in the real world. This demonstrates that assertive *ba*-constructions encompass both realis and irrealis mode deviating from high transitivity.

Table 5 summarizes distribution of mode in assertive *ba*-constructions within spoken dialogue corpora.

Table 5
Distribution of Mode in Assertive Ba-Constructions

Mode Type	Number	Proportion
Realis	110	77.5%
Irrealis	32	22.5%

According to Table 5, the majority of assertive *ba*-constructions exhibit realis mode, while over twenty percent show irrealis mode deviating from high transitivity. Besides the hypothetical irrealis mode illustrated in the examples, other irrealis mode observed in assertive *ba*-constructions include negation, optative, habitual, and so on.

Directive *Ba*-constructions and Mode

Directive acts are speech acts performed by speakers to attempt to make the hearer do something, striving to align the world with their words. These acts can be categorized into commands, suggestions, and requests (See Examples (8) (9) (10)).

Example (8)

> (Situation: Jiao Yang uses a recording to threaten President Sun for his salary)
>
> Jiao Yang: Shi zheyang a, Sun zong. Wo gensui nin shenhou zuo zheme duo nian shier
>
> > *be   this   I   follow you behind   do so   many year thing*
>
> le, wo ye butai xiang cihou nin le, suoyi ne, jintian dui nin tichu yidianer xiaoxiao de
>
> > *I   no longer wish serve you   therefore today   for you make a little   small*
>
> yaoqiu, jiushi **ba** jiezhi dao jintian weizhi, wo de gongzi gei wo jie le.
>
> *request that is   due up to today   till   my   wage for me pay*
>
> (Well, President Sun, I have been working behind you for somany years, and I no longer wish to serve you. Therefore, today, I am making a small request that you pay me the wages due up to today.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 9, 17'29'')

Example (9)

> (Situation: Guoran comes to Yang Tao's workplace to apologize, and Yang Tao calls Guoran outside the hall)
>
> Yang Tao: Shizai shi fanbushang zai wo zheyang de yike shu shang **ba** ziger diaosi, duiba?
>
> > *really   be not worth   on me   this   one tree   on   oneself hang to death right*
>
> (It really isn't worth it to hang yourself on one tree like me, right?) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 2, 38'08'')

Example (10)

> (Situation: Xifeng and Suqing finish their divorce procedures at Guoran's place, and after Suqing leaves)
>
> Xifeng: Guoran, ni **ba** na jiehunzheng   liugei wo cheng ma?
>
> > *you   that marriage certificate   leave with me could you*
>
> (Guoran, could you leave the marriage certificate with me?) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 2, 26'45'')

In Example (8), the essential condition is met as the speaker (Jiao Yang) attempts to make the hearer (President Sun) perform an action, specifically paying him his wages. The sincerity condition is also met since Jiao Yang demands that President Sun takes the action of paying the salary. The preparatory condition is satisfied as Jiao Yang strives to align the world with his words by having President Sun take the action described. The propositional condition is fulfilled as it involves future action. Thus, Example (8) is a directive act. Examples (9) and (10) can be similarly analyzed. In these three examples, Example (8) is a command, Example (9) is a suggestion, and Example (10) is a request.

Notably, Examples (8)-(10) all exhibit irrealis mode deviating from high transitivity. When analyzing the mode of directive *ba*-constructions, we find that all such sentences are in irrealis mode (see Table 6). This closely relates to the constitutive conditions of directive acts, particularly the propositional condition requiring future action, which determines the potentiality and hence necessitates irrealis mode.

Table 6

Distribution of Mode in Directive Ba-constructions

Mode Type	Number	Proportion
Realis	0	0%
Irrealis	140	100%

Declarative *Ba*-constructions and Mode

A declaration speech act refers to a linguistic action performed by a speaker intending to alter the external conditions of an object or situation. In such speech acts, the speaker may either align words with the world or align the world with words (see Example (11)).

Example (11)

> (Situation: Guoran's father is upset because Qiuqiu has left; Guoran's mother encourages him to drink royal jelly)
>
> Guoran's mother: Fanzheng zhege ne, wo yijing dakai le, ni yaoshi bu he ne, wo jiu
>
> > *anyway   this   I already open   you if   not drink I will*

ba ta dao lou, **ba** ta dao le qu.

it pour away   it pour away

(Anyway, I've already opened it. If you don't drink it, I'll just pour it away.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 28, 11'43'')

In Example (11), the speaker declares her intention to perform a specific action. That is, Guoran's mother declares that she will pour out the royal jelly. The declaration speech act reflects the speaker's intention to change the external conditions of a given object or situation. Guoran's mother aims to change the state of the royal jelly being inside the bottle, attempting to make the world conform to her words. This example represents irrealis mode construction. All other *ba*-constructions expressing declaration speech acts also exhibit the same pattern, deviating from high transitivity and occurring exclusively in the irrealis mode (see Table 7).

Table 7.
Distribution of Mode in Declarative Ba-constructions

Mode Type	Number	Proportion
Realis	0	0%
Irrealis	25	100%

Commissive *Ba*-constructions and Mode

A commissive speech act refers to a linguistic action in which the speaker makes a commitment to perform a certain action in the future, striving to make the world conform to their words (see Example (12)).

Example (12)

(Situation: Yangtao, Guoran, and their parents meet at a teahouse after the wedding)

Guoran's father: Qinjiamu, zhe wo zhidao, zheme duo nian, ni yigeren ba

Moter-in-law this we know   these all years you on your own

Taozi lache da, bu rongyi, zhenshi bu rongyi. Zhe ni fangxin, Taozi jiran jin le women

raise up   not easy   really   not easy   this you rest assured   since be part of our

guojia,   women guojia yiding **ba** ta dangcheng qin guinu yiyang duidai de.

Guo family our Guo family   must   her treat as our own daughter same   treat

(Mother-in-law, I understand—raising Yangtao on your own all these years couldn't have been easy; it's truly admirable. Please rest assured, now that Yangtao has become part of our Guo family, we will treat her as our own daughter without reservation.) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 33, 18'04'')

Example (12) also exhibits an irrealis mode. Similar to directive and declarative speech acts, all *ba*-constructions expressing commissive speech acts are irrealis mode constructions that deviate from high transitivity (see Table 8). This pattern is determined by the constitutive rules of commissives. The propositional conditions of commissives are the same as those of directives—that is, both involve actions to be taken in the future. The non-actual nature of these actions ensures the unreality of the mode.

Table 8.
Distribution of mode in commissive ba-constructions

Mode Type	Number	Proportion
Realis	0	0%
Irrealis	21	100%

Expressive *Ba*-constructions and Mode

Among the five categories of speech acts expressed through *ba*-constructions, expressive speech acts represent the least frequent type, with only 6 instances identified across the 334 corpus examples. In fact, each of the other four categories may simultaneously express the speaker's emotions or attitudes. As a result, one might argue that the category of expressive speech acts could be eliminated altogether, or, as Zhao (2012) suggests, such overlapping cases could be classified separately as a distinct hybrid category. However, we believe neither approach is viable, because there are purely emotive *ba*-constructions that cannot be subsumed under any of the aforementioned four categories of speech acts. When other types of speech acts do express emotion or attitude, they should be analyzed from the perspective of subjective stance, rather than from the standpoint of categorial overlap. Purely expressive *ba*-constructions include:

Example (13)

(Guoran's mother calls Guoran to wish him a happy birthday)

Guoran's mother: Guoran na, zhu ni shengri kuaile a!

w*ish you birthday happy*

(Guoran, I wish you a very happy birthday!)

Guoran: Xiexie! Ganxie nin **ba** wo yangyu cheng ren.

thank you thank you   I raise   into adult

(Thank you! Thanks for raising me into adulthood!) (*Let's Get Married*, Episode 13, 7'35'')

In Example (13), the speaker expresses gratitude. Beyond emotional expression, it does not belong to any of the other four categories of speech acts. Therefore, it is classified as expressive *ba*-constructions.

All expressive *ba*-constructions also exhibit irrealis mode, deviating from high transitivity (see Table 9). This pattern is determined by the constitutive rules of emotive speech acts: their preconditions presuppose correspondence between words and the world. This presupposition leads to the non-actuality of the mode.

Table 9.
Distribution of Mode in Expressive Ba-constructions

Mode Type	Number	Proportion
Realis	0	0%
Irrealis	6	100%

The above analysis reveals that among the five categories of speech acts, the constitutive rules of directives, declaratives, commissives, and expressives inherently determine the use of irrealis mode. In the conversational spoken corpus, these four categories together account for nearly two-thirds of all *ba*-constructions. Additionally, assertives themselves may also appear in irrealis mode. As discourse motivations, speech acts contribute to the predominance of irrealis mode in *ba*-constructions within spoken dialogic contexts, thus driving deviations in transitivity parameters.

In summary, the deviation from high transitivity in spoken dialogic *ba*-constructions can be accounted for from the perspectives of speech acts and mode. Although high-transitivity *ba*-constructions frequently exhibit low-transitivity parameter settings—an apparent violation of the transitivity hypothesis—it appears that these low-transitivity parameters co-vary around mode as a central axis. This indicates that the deviation from expected transitivity patterns in *ba*-constructions actually serves as evidence supporting the transitivity hypothesis.

Summary

This paper does not aim to argue that *ba*-constructions in spoken dialogic contexts are inherently low-transitivity constructions. On the contrary, this study aligns with existing research and accepts the established consensus that *ba*-constructions are high-transitivity constructions. What this paper seeks to explain is the phenomenon of transitivity deviation observed in *ba*-constructions.

Through the analysis of mode and speech acts in *ba*-constructions within spoken dialogic discourse, this study has identified a connection between speech acts and mode. Specifically, directive, declarative, commissive, and expressive speech acts—which together account for nearly two-thirds of all *ba*-constructions in spoken dialogues—are governed by constitutive rules that determine their irrealis mode. These speech acts function as discourse motivations driving deviations in the transitivity parameters of mode.

As one of the key parameters for determining transitivity, mode deviation serves as a central axis that triggers shifts in other transitivity-related parameters. The interplay among speech act, mode, and transitivity deviation reflects a closely interconnected system within the semantic structure of *ba*-constructions. The co-variation of low-transitivity parameters around mode as a central pivot precisely confirms the validity of the transitivity hypothesis.

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