Some Notes on the Syntax of BECOME

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It is argued that BECOME is an independent functional category in the argument structure, being a member of the family of light verbs (or ‘eventuality predicates’). The complement of BECOME is the resultant state while the specifier is the ‘Affectee’. BECOME in Chinese can be a phonetically overt head, for instance, gei in (1) which enforces the affectedness reading in the inchoative. When the light verb CAUSE, i.e. ba in (2), is introduced forming a causative, the structure of BECOME remains unchanged. If CAUSE is null, gei may move to CAUSE, deriving (3). If gei does not move, it blocks the movement of the verb, as shown in (4).

It is further claimed that the Affectee cannot receive Case from BECOME; instead, it may receive Case from T or from an ECM light verb like ba in (2). The PRO Theorem explains why having a PRO in (5) is ungrammatical. If the Affectee is a pro, it must refer to the matrix subject, under the Generalized Control Theory (Huang 1989), and such a configuration violates Binding Condition B. Consequently, filling the specifier of BECOME should not be for Case; instead, it is for the EPP, contributing to an outcome at the LF interface, such as some ‘surface’ interpretation (Chomsky 2001). Regardless of whether the affectedness reading is ‘strong’ or ‘weak’, BECOME must have the EPP-feature, and hence a subject.

(1) Ta gei dashang-le.
   he BECOME hurt-Perf
   ‘He got hurt.’

(2) Wo ba  ta gei dashang-le.
   I   CAUSE he BECOME hurt-Perf
   ‘I hurt him.’

(3) Wo gei, ta ti dashang-le.
   I GEI he hurt-Perf
   ‘I hurt him.’

(4) *Wo dashang-le, ta gei ti.
   I hurt-Perf he BECOME

(5) *Wo ba PRO/pro gei dashang-le.
   I CAUSE PRO/pro BECOME hurt-Perf
   ‘I hurt *(somebody).’