An experimental test of the temporal sequence principle in Chinese

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The temporal sequence principle

- Tai (1985, p. 50):
  The relative word order between two syntactic units is determined by the temporal order of the states which they represent in the conceptual world.
- Thus in many Chinese constructions, the referent of the earlier syntactic unit occurs before the later unit, which is why they may not be reversed in the syntax:
  - Verb: Ta zai chufang-li zufan.
  - Adverb: Ta ping-le san tian le.
  - Resultative: Ta pao-lei le.
  - Serial verb: Zhangsan shanglou shujiao.
  - Temporal connective: Ni gei-le wo qian cai neng zou.

Conclusions

- Contrary to the temporal sequence principle, Chinese word order mostly ignores event order
- The principle is restricted to a subset of cases:
  - For temporal sentences that describe fixed-order events, reversing word order reduces acceptability

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