Within the framework of Cognitive Grammar (e.g. Langacker 2008), this paper offers a symbolic account of how non-core arguments (e.g. causers, instruments, beneficiaries) are licensed through an analysis of the so-called Retained-Object Constructions in Chinese ba-sentences, where an object stays behind the verb instead of moving to the expected preverbal position after ba, which now takes a non-core argument (Zhang & Tang 2011). Unlike the mainstream generative grammar, which proposes many purely formal devices to “introduce” arguments (e.g. Pylkkänen 2008), CG holds that 1) the meaning of a verb is not its argument structure but a certain profile (which could be modified in contexts) imposed on rich conceptual base; 2) within the conceptual base, an element, no matter core (core argument) or peripheral (non-core argument), becomes the subject or object as long as it can receive some sort of focal prominence. It is argued that the non-core arguments in the retained-object constructions are licensed by the focusing of a non-focal participant and the defocusing of the focal participant. It will also be shown that the present account can nicely account for the different grammatical behaviors of two variants of the retained-object constructions, e.g. omissibility of the retained-object and switchability of the two object NPs.

References