

A Cognitive Contrastive Study of
English and Chinese Passives

英汉被动句 认知对比研究

王志军 著

W
外教社

上海外语教育出版社

H318.3
99
A Cognitive Contrastive Study of
English and Chinese Passives

英汉被动句 认知对比研究

王志军 著



W. 上海外语教育出版社
外教社

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The present book is a revision of my doctoral dissertation. While many of the analyses and observations go back to the original work, some theoretical descriptions and descriptive material have been amended to better clarify my cognitive approach to a contrastive study of English and Chinese passives.

It is my pleasant duty to thank the many people who, in one way or another, have contributed to both my doctoral dissertation and this book.

I'm grateful to Professor Xiong Xueliang, supervisor of my Ph.D. dissertation, who has provided me with numerous valuable suggestions and criticisms while offering encouragement. While he is less directly involved in the revising process, his comments on first drafts of this book have been much appreciated.

I am particularly indebted to the following professors: Professor Cheng Qilong, Chu Xiaoquan, Qu Weiguo, Zeng Daoming, Xu Yulong, and Zhang Chunbai. All of them have contributed to producing a better product by reading my dissertation drafts and giving me many detailed constructive comments and valuable suggestions.

My thanks are further due to Mrs. Judy Shore-Pullen, Professor Qing Yuxiang, Bai Jiehong, Ning Yizhong, Xiao Jian'an and my friends Bai Hong'ai, Wei Han, who have carefully read the draft of my doctoral dissertation and provided detailed comments on it in terms of style and grammar.

I am obliged to my friends and classmates in Fudan University who have helped me by discussion, informant responses, encouragement, etc. They include Jiang Yong, Gao Yongwei, Wang Fufang, Hu Jian, Wang Bin, Wang Shaohua, Wang Quanzhi, Zheng Shou-

jiang, Liu Guohui, Peng Jianwu, Liang Xiaobo, Sun Ya, Li Yongzhong and many others.

My special thanks go to anonymous reviewers appointed by Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press. Their constructive comments have helped me considerably in streamlining my work into the present book. I thank the executive editor from the press for their help with the formatting of this book and other practical matters.

Finally, I want to thank my family for their constant support and encouragement at all stages of the work. Without them, what I have done would not have been possible and life itself would not mean much.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
-------------------------------	---

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
-------------------------------------	---

1.1 English-Chinese contrastive studies: aims, status quo and problems	1
1.2 The problems concerning a contrastive study of English and Chinese passives	5
1.2.1 The problems concerning the definition of voice	6
1.2.2 The problems concerning a contrastive study of English and Chinese passives	19
1.3 My approach	20
1.4 The organization of the chapters	20

Chapter 2 A Formalist Study of English and Chinese Passives	28
--	----

2.1 A formalist study of English passives and its problems ...	30
2.1.1 Early transformational analyses	31
2.1.2 The analysis of the passive using the Extended Standard Theory and Principles and Parameters Theory	32
2.2 A formalist study of Chinese passives and its problems ...	37
2.3 Summary	40

Chapter 3 *A Cognitive Study of English and Chinese Passives* 41

3.1	A cognitive study of the passive: one of the functional approaches taken in the current study	41
3.2	A cognitive semantic study of the passive	46
3.2.1	A cognitive approach to semantics	46
3.2.2	A cognitive study of verb meaning: ICM of events	49
3.2.3	A cognitive analysis of "basic voice"	63
3.2.4	A cognitive analysis of the passive	68
3.3	A discourse-pragmatic study of the passive	72
3.3.1	The pragmatics of voice	72
3.3.2	The functional domains of the passive: demotion, promotion and resulting state	74
3.4	A cognitive definition of (passive) voice	78
3.5	A cognitive interpretation of English and Chinese passives	79
3.5.1	A cognitive interpretation of English passives	79
3.5.2	A cognitive interpretation of Chinese passives ...	88
3.6	Summary	98

Chapter 4 *A Contrastive Study of English and Chinese Passives* 100

4.1	The similarities and differences between English and Chinese prototypical passives in the process of conceptualization	100
4.1.1	The similarities between English and Chinese prototypical passives	101

4.1.2	The differences between English and Chinese prototypical passives	116
4.1.2.1	The difference in the degree of affectedness	116
4.1.2.2	The difference in actual realization of subjectivity	127
4.2	The similarities and differences between English and Chinese prototypical passives in the process of schematization	134
4.2.1	The similarities between English and Chinese prototypical passives	134
4.2.2	The differences between English and Chinese prototypical passives	135
4.2.2.1	The difference between English and Chinese agentless passives	139
4.2.2.2	The difference between English and Chinese agentful passives	154
4.3	The similarities and differences between English and Chinese non-prototypical passives	160
4.4	Summary	169
Chapter 5	<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	174
5.1	Main contributions of the work	174
5.2	Implications for translation	180
5.3	Implications for language teaching	187
5.4	Limitations and suggestions for future research	189
Notes		191
References		196

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 *English-Chinese contrastive studies: aims, status quo and problems*

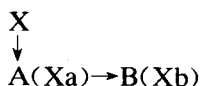
Contrastive linguistics (or contrastive analysis, contrastive studies) is defined as a branch of linguistics which studies two or more languages synchronically, with the aim of discovering their differences and similarities and applying these findings to related areas of study (柯平, 1999: 9).

From the definition we can see that there are two aims for contrastive studies: the first is to discover the differences and similarities among different languages, the second is to apply the findings to related areas of study. As for the two aims, we should clear up some wrong assumptions. First, discovering the similarities and differences among different languages does not mean pointing out some superficial similarities and differences among different languages but finding out the general principles or the deep mechanism which brings about the superficial similarities and differences among different languages under research. The aim to discover the differences and similarities among different languages is indispensable to the development of general linguistics. As we know, most modern linguistic the-

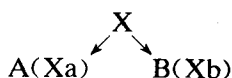
ories thus far proposed are based on the study of western languages. Some models of language can describe certain features of language more successfully than others. To form a really powerful, universally valid language theory or "Universal Grammar," as Transformational Grammar has been claiming to do, researchers of language are in constant need of testing and modifying their theories against the findings derived from contrastive analyses made across different languages. Second, the aim to apply the findings obtained from contrastive studies is meaningful to us in that the study of contrastive data might suggest solutions to various practical linguistic problems we may face, especially those which cannot be solved without the analysis of evidence from more than one language. In other words, the second aim must be based on the first aim. The second aim of application can be put into practice only if the first aim is achieved. Otherwise, we would achieve unsatisfactory or even wrong results. Take the contrastive study of English and Chinese passives as an example. After we have a look at the structures to express the passive in English and Chinese, such a hasty conclusion is often arrived at: the English passive construction "SUBJ + BE + V-EN" is equal to the Chinese *bei* construction. But it is not the case in actual application; the English passive sentences such as "The violin was made by my father," "The meeting was held yesterday" cannot be translated into the Chinese *bei* construction and some foreign students often make wrong Chinese passives such as "终于,我编的书被出版了", "那些汉字被写完了".

To meet the two aims, contrastive linguistics is often studied along two directions. One is theoretical or "pure" contrastive linguistics; the other is applied contrastive linguistics. The theoretical contrastive linguistics tries to find suitable models

and theoretical frameworks for comparison and to establish such key notions as congruence, similarity, and equivalence between the forms of different languages. It is concerned with the universal categories or features (X) that are common to all languages or at least to the pair of languages being compared. It takes as its task the examination of how these universal categories or features (X) are realized and employed in specific languages, say A and B (柯平, 1999: 10 – 11). The applied contrastive linguistics has as its objective the application of the findings of the theoretical contrastive linguistics to the contrasting of two or more languages for certain practical purposes, notably L2 (one's second or foreign language) teaching and learning, translation, bilingual lexicography, etc. The applied contrastive linguistics differs from the theoretical contrastive linguistics in that it is preoccupied with the problem of how a universal category X, realized in language as Xa, is rendered in language B (Xb). This difference can be shown in the following figure:



(applied contrastive linguistics)



(theoretical contrastive linguistics)

It can be seen that the applied contrastive linguistics is unidirectional whereas the theoretical contrastive linguistics is bi-directional or multidirectional.

Since in the one-way traffic of the applied contrastive linguistics only Xa and Xb are set in comparison, there exists the danger that the contrastivist may overlook the X (the universal category or features) behind them. Therefore, much more importance should be attached to the theoretical contrastive linguistics so as to achieve something of universal or typological

importance. What is more important, when we do some contrastive studies about two or more languages belonging to different language families, more efforts should be made to find out the universal features underlying the quite different linguistic forms. And, on the basis of this, we can further explore the deep mechanism that generates their different forms and achieve something of typological significance.

In China, there is a long history of English-Chinese¹ contrastive studies, which have been concerned with different aspects of language and related fields such as lexicon, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, rhetoric, culture, psychology and mind. And many results have been achieved. However, there exist some problems with the present English-Chinese contrastive studies in China (牛保义, 徐盛桓, 2000; 伍雅清, 2000). First, the contrastive study is constrained by the practicality of teaching, and therefore produces unsatisfactory results. Reviewing the past twenty or thirty years of English-Chinese contrastive studies, we find that most of them are interested in the superficial differences between English and Chinese in different aspects, aiming at providing guidance for language learning, language use and translation. We cannot deny the positive value of such a study, but as it is just satisfied with listing and describing the superficial similarities and differences of some linguistic phenomena between English and Chinese and devoid of explanation and interpretation, it is far from the aim of a contrastive study of finding out the universal features underlying superficial linguistic phenomena across different languages and the deep mechanism which generates the different surface structures by investigating and describing these surface structures and forms of different languages. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the theoretical exploration in a contrastive study, inclu-

ding looking for an ideal model for a contrastive study which can bring about satisfactory results, e. g. , the common features underlying some linguistic phenomena between English and Chinese. Second, an important reason for the unsatisfactory status quo of English-Chinese contrastive studies is that it is separated from the international linguistic research and devoid of guidance of modern linguistic theories. Most of the past English and Chinese contrastive studies were busy with summarizing the different linguistic features of the two languages, and did not pay enough attention to the modern linguistic research at home or abroad, especially abroad. In fact, almost all the topics discussed in the literature on English-Chinese contrastive studies have been studied or are under investigation in the world's modern linguistic research and many cross-linguistic results have been achieved. If we are directed by these results, we will find it easier to perform an English-Chinese contrastive study and achieve some fruitful results. What is more important, our results can be used to test, complement or modify the modern linguistic theories, and a more comprehensive and universally valid theory can be produced. In terms of a contrastive study of English and Chinese passives, a few results on this topic in modern linguistic theories have been applied to conducting the study, especially the discussion on this topic in cognitive linguistics.

1.2 *The problems concerning a contrastive study of English and Chinese passives*

Passive is a kind of voice. To make a contrastive study of

English and Chinese passives, we should have a definition of voice which is suitable for both English and Chinese. Such a definition, however, is still wanting.

1.2.1 The problems concerning the definition of voice

According to Quirk *et al* (1985:195), voice is a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the action of a sentence in either of the two ways, without change in the facts reported. The English voice system is composed of the active and the passive voice.

In English, the active-passive relation includes two grammatical levels: the verb phrase and the clause. In the verbal phrase, the difference between the two voice categories is that the passive form is composed of "BE (auxiliary) + past participle (of the main verb)". At the clause level, changing from the active to the passive involves the following processes: (a) the active subject becomes the passive AGENT; (b) the active object becomes the passive subject; and (c) the preposition *by* is introduced before the agent. The prepositional phrase of the passive sentence is generally an optional element.

This definition, however, is far from satisfactory. The first problem with it is that there is no systematic correspondence between the active and passive sentences. Quirk *et al* (1985:162-170) distinguishes five kinds of "voice constraints" associated with the verb, the object, the agent, meaning, and frequency of use in English.

First, there are greater restrictions on verbs occurring in the passive than on verbs occurring in the active. It is reasonable for the copular and intransitive verbs not to occur in the passive, as they have no objects. Some transitive verbs, howev-

er, do not occur at least in some senses in the passive, for example;

- (1) They have a nice house.
- (2) The dress becomes her.

All these verbs are stative verbs of “being” and “having”. But other stative verbs, such as those of volition or attitude, can easily take the passive. Contrast:

- (3) The coat does not fit you. ~ *You are not fitted by the coat.
- (4) The police want him. ~ He is wanted by the police.

Furthermore, even action verbs do not always occur in the passive. Granger (1983: 222) compares the following sentences:

- (5) He turned the corner. ~ *The corner was turned by him.
- (6) He turned the page. ~ The page was turned by him.

Conversely, some passive sentences do not have their corresponding active forms:

- (7) John was said to be a good teacher. ~ *They said him to be a good teacher.

Moreover, the active-passive correspondence cannot account for the fact that the same combinations of verb and preposition can occur in the passive in some cases, but not in other cases. Contrast:

- (8) a. The problem was very carefully gone into by the engineers.
b. ?*The tunnel was carefully gone into by the engineers.

We can attribute the acceptability of sentences like (8a) to the fact that the combinations of verb and preposition like *go into* are used abstractly and figuratively whereas sentences like (8b) are unacceptable because the combinations of verb and preposition are not used idiomatically (Quirk *et al.*, 1985:163). However, some combinations of verb and preposition which do not have an idiomatic use can also occur in the passive in certain contexts. Bolinger (1975) have made it clear that some non-lexicalized combinations also allow for passivization. Bolinger notes the following contrasts:

- (9) a. * This bridge has been walked under by my brother.
a'. This bridge has been walked under by generations of lovers.
b. * The stairs have been run up by Jane.
b'. The stairs have been run up so much that the carpet is threadbare.
c. * The lake was camped beside by my sister.
c'. This lake is not to be camped beside by anybody.

Second, the clausal objects can rarely occur in the passive:

- (10) John thought (that) she was attractive. ~ ? * That she was attractive was thought (by John).
(11) John hoped to meet her. ~ * To meet her was hoped (by John).
(12) John enjoyed seeing her. ~ * ? Seeing her was enjoyed (by John).

The passive often becomes acceptable, however, when the object is a finite clause and the clausal object is extraposed and replaced by the anticipatory pronoun *it*:

- (13) It was thought that she was attractive.

or when the subject of the object clause is made the subject of a passive superordinate clause, as in:

- (14) She was thought to be attractive.

In addition, when the object is realized by reflexive pronouns, reciprocal pronouns and object nouns preceded by possessive pronouns co-referential to the subject, the passive transformation is more or less restricted in use;

- (15) John could see himself in the mirror. ~ * Himself could be seen in the mirror.
 (16) We could hardly see each other in the fog. ~ * Each other could hardly be seen in the fog.
 (17) The woman shook her head. (Compare: Her head shook.) ~ * Her head was shaken by the woman.

But as for object nouns preceded by possessive pronouns which co-refer to the subjects, the passive transformation is possible if they are affected by an external cause:

- (18) He cut his finger. (Compare: * His finger cut.) ~ His finger was cut by himself.
 (19) Her hair was done by herself, but her breakfast was prepared by her mother.

Third, unlike the active subject, the agent *by*-phrase is generally optional. According to Svartvik (1985:141), of the agentive passives in his collected material, 80 percent are agentless.

Fourth, contrary to the active-passive correspondence, some actives and their corresponding passives do not have the same propositional meaning. Contrast:

(20) Every schoolboy knows one joke at least.

(21) One joke at least is known by every schoolboy.

(20) is different from (21) in that (20) means "Each schoolboy knows at least some joke or other" whereas (21) means "There is one particular joke which is known to every schoolboy". Compare other two sentences:

(22) John cannot do it.

(23) It cannot be done (by John).

In (22), *can* expresses ability whereas in (23), it expresses possibility.

Finally, though the passive is claimed to view the same action of a sentence as the corresponding active, without change in the fact reported, the passive is used much less commonly than the active. And another noticeable difference in the frequency with which the active and the passive voices are used is that the passive is generally more commonly used in informative than in imaginative writing, and is obviously more frequently used in the objective, impersonal style of scientific articles and news reporting.

Therefore we need a definition of voice which can interpret the various constraints presented above.

The second problem with the definition of voice proposed by Quirk *et al* is that a dichotomy of voice by no means gives an adequate account of the whole picture of the voice system in English. There are some peripheral cases which are different from the active and the passive but closely related to them, whose status is not identified in the voice system.

First, the purely formal definition of the passive, namely the BE + V-EN construction, includes several kinds of passives which are not identical by taking account of the verb's function