Passive constructions in English and Chinese

A corpus-based contrastive study

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This article combines the corpus-based and contrastive approaches, seeking to provide a systematic account of passive constructions in two typologically distinct languages, namely British English and Mandarin Chinese. We will first explore, on the basis of written and spoken corpus data, a range of characteristics of passives in the two languages including various passive constructions, long vs. short passives, semantic, pragmatic and syntactic features as well as genre variations. On the basis of this exploration, passive constructions in the two languages are contrasted in a structured way. Methodologically, this study demonstrates that comparable monolingual corpora can be exploited fruitfully in contrastive linguistics.

Keywords: passive, genre, Chinese/English

1. Introduction

For decades, passives in both English and Chinese have been subject to much research, both corpus-based and non-corpus-based. A number of contrastive studies of passive constructions in the two languages have also been published, which however did not use corpus data, being based, rather, on a handful of examples which are common to nearly all of these papers (e.g. Fan 1994; Wang 1997; Yu 2001; Zhou and Xia 2002; Gu 2003). The work presented in this article combines the corpus methodology with a contrastive perspective, seeking to provide a more systematic account of passive constructions in the two typologically distinct languages on the basis of corpus data.

The advantages of using corpora in language studies in general, and using parallel and comparable corpora for translation and contrastive studies in

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particular, have been explored in details elsewhere (e.g. McEnery, Xiao and Tono 2006; McEnery and Xiao forthcoming). Here we will only present our corpus data. Four corpora are used in this study. The Freiburg–LOB corpus (i.e. FLOB) is an update of LOB (Lancaster–Oslo–Bergen corpus of British English, see Johansson, Leech and Goodluck 1978) which sampled texts published in 1991–1992 (Hundt, Sand and Siemund 1998). A second corpus, the Lancaster Corpus of Mandarin Chinese (i.e. LCMC), was designed as a Chinese match for FLOB, representing written Chinese published in China in the early 1990s (McEnery, Xiao and Mo 2003). Both corpora consist of five hundred 2,000-word samples taken proportionally from the same 15 genres in English and Chinese, each totalling one million words. The two comparable corpora have not only made it possible to compare English and Chinese in general, they have also allowed us to reveal more fine-grained genre distinctions between the two languages. The genres covered in FLOB/LCMC and their proportions are given in Table 1.

In addition to written corpus data, two spoken corpora of sampling periods similar to that of FLOB/LCMC are used in this study to compare written and spoken English/Chinese. We decided to use only typical spoken data, i.e. dialogue while excluding transitory genres such as written-to-be-spoken scripts or prepared speech. For English, we used the demographically sampled

Table 1. Genres covered in FLOB/LCMC

Code	Genre	No. of samples	Proportion
A	Press reportage	44	8.8%
B	Press editorials	27	5.4%
C	Press reviews	17	3.4%
D	Religion	17	3.4%
E	Skills, trades and hobbies	38	7.6%
F	Popular lore	44	8.8%
G	Biographies and essays	77	15.4%
H	Miscellaneous (reports, official documents)	30	6%
J	Science (academic prose)	80	16%
K	General fiction	29	5.8%
L	Mistery/detective fiction	24	4.8%
M	Science fiction	6	1.2%
N	Adventure fiction	29	5.8%
P	Romantic fiction	29	5.8%
R	Humour	9	1.8%
Total		500	100%

component of the British National Corpus (the World Edition, hereafter referred to as BNCdemo), which contains approximately four million words of conversational data sampled during 1985–1994 in the UK (Aston and Burnard 1998). For Chinese, only a much smaller corpus was available to us, the Callhome Mandarin Chinese Transcript released by the Linguistic Data Consortium in 1996. The corpus comprises 5 or 10 minute segments taken from 120 unscripted telephone conversations between native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, totalling approximately 300,000 words. As these corpora are of different sizes, the raw frequencies extracted from them were normalized to a common basis or the proportional data for each corpus was used where appropriate.

In the remainder of this article, we will first discuss passive constructions in English and Chinese, on the basis of which similarities and differences between the two languages will be explored.

2. Passives in English

2.1 Passive variants in English

The passive in English is grammatically marked by a copular verb followed by a past participle. The structure *be* + *past participle* can be considered as the norm for English passives. However, *be* in the structure can also be replaced by other copular verbs such as *get*, *become*, *feel*, *look*, *remain* and *seem* because the passive meaning is essentially expressed by past participles. There are clear differences between *be* passives and these variants in their structural configuration — the latter require the auxiliary verb *do* in negations and questions, for example. In addition to such surface differences, there are further differences between the two, which will be explored in this section. Nevertheless, we will confine our discussion to *be* and *get* passives as the use of other passive constructions is limited by the lexical meanings of those semi-linking verbs. We will also exclude the pseudo-passive forms with *get* as identified (Types b–f) in Carter and McCarthy (1999: 46–47), because it is more appropriate, in our view, to treat those pseudo-passives as causative constructions. Note that *be* and *get* passives are not always interchangeable because of the differences discussed below. For example, *get* passives only occur in dynamic events (cf. Cheshire 2005) while *be* passives are not sensitive to the semantic feature of dynamicity. Quirk et al. (1985: 162) note that "[t]he *get* passive provides a convenient way of avoiding the passive with *be* in cases where there is a potential confusion between the normal passive interpretation and that of the 'statal pas-

sive'" (e.g. *The chair was broken*). This is made possible by the dynamic nature of the *get* passive. Also, when the passivized verb is followed by an infinitival complement, only the *be* passive is appropriate (cf. Palmer 1974: 341–370). For example, in *they liked to be seen to go to church* (BNC: KD6), *be seen* cannot be replaced by *get seen*.

It has been observed that some sentences in the active voice can also express a passive meaning (e.g. Kenneth 1993). For example, it is said that *These clothes wash well* is equivalent to *These clothes are washed well*. Nevertheless, while the two sentences express a sort of passive meaning — clothes do not wash themselves — the active form indicates the inherent property of these clothes (i.e. they can be washed well) whereas the passive form expresses a different meaning (i.e. they are washed well on a particular occasion). Given these differences, and considering that unmarked passives cannot be studied efficiently using a corpus-based approach, we will not consider notional passives in this article.

It can be said that the *be* passive is the unmarked passive form in English while the *get* passive is the marked form. The *get* passive has long been considered as a problematic construction and has aroused much interest from researchers. Carter and McCarthy (1999) provide an excellent review of previous studies, both corpus-based and non-corpus-based, of the *get*-passive when they discuss the implications of this construction for an interpersonal grammar on the basis of samples from the CANCODE spoken corpus (Carter and McCarthy 2004). This section compares the two alternative passive forms in terms of their syntactic features, semantic/pragmatic properties, and their distributions across genres, on the basis of the written data from FLOB and the spoken data from BNCdemo. The frequencies of *be* and *get* passives are given in Table 2.

For easy comparison, normalized frequencies (per 100,000 words) are also given. Note that, unless otherwise stated, the frequencies used in this section only include the structure *be/get* followed immediately by the past participle of a lexical verb (excluding auxiliary verbs *be*, *do* and *have* etc.), thus instances such as *was badly damaged* where there is an intervening adverbial are excluded.

Table 2. Frequencies of *be* and *get* passives in FLOB and BNCdemo

Corpus	***Be* passive**		***Get* passive**	
	Frequency	Per 100K words	Frequency	Per 100K words
FLOB	9908	854	59	5
BNCdemo	5001	101	1300	26
Total	14909	955	1359	31

We made this decision so as to ensure the frequencies of *be* and *get* passives are comparable while being able to exclude occurrences such as *get* followed by a noun plus a past participle, a structure conveying a causative rather than passive meaning. Fixed expressions such as *get rid of* and repetitions in the spoken data were also excluded. It can be seen from Table 2 that *be* passives are more frequent than *get* passives, especially in written English. In addition to this quantitative contrast, there are other differences between the two alternative passive constructions, which will be explored in the following sections.

2.2 Long vs. short passives

As the passive voice is often used as a strategy to highlight the patient and its affectedness, the agent becomes less important, and often optional in the right context. Hence, it can be expected that agentless passives are significantly more frequent than those with an agent. Following Biber et al. (1999: 935), we refer to passives with an agent as "long passives" and to those which leave the agent unexpressed as "short passives". Table 3 gives the frequencies of long and short passives. As can be seen, in FLOB the short form of the *be* passive is over eight times as frequent as its long form while for the *get* passive the short form is over ten times as frequent as the long form. The contrast in BNCdemo is even more marked, where short forms of *be* and *get* passives are over 18 and 37 times as frequent respectively as their long forms. Clearly, short passives are more frequent than long passives in both written and spoken English, as illustrated in Figure 1. Short passives are also significantly more common in spoken than written English (LL=209.225 for 1 degree of freedom, $p < 0.001$).

A further difference related to the long vs. short distinction is that *get* passives are more likely (LL=76.015 for 1 degree of freedom, $p < 0.001$) than *be* passives to occur without an agent, as shown in Figure 2. The agents in *get* passives are typically impersonal (e.g. *got caught by the police*) or even inanimate (e.g. *got knocked down by a car*). When personal agents appear, they are typically informationally dense and thus semantically indispensable (e.g. *The bleeding fat girl, he got asked out by her*). While agency generally plays a secondary role in passives, the tendency to leave the agent unexpressed in *get* passives appears

Table 3. Long vs. short passives in FLOB and BNCdemo

Corpus	***Be* passive**		***Get* passive**	
	Long	Short	Long	Short
FLOB	1073 (10.8%)	8835 (89.2%)	5 (8.5%)	54 (91.5%)
BNCdemo	256 (5.1%)	4745 (94.9%)	34 (2.6%)	1266 (97.4%)

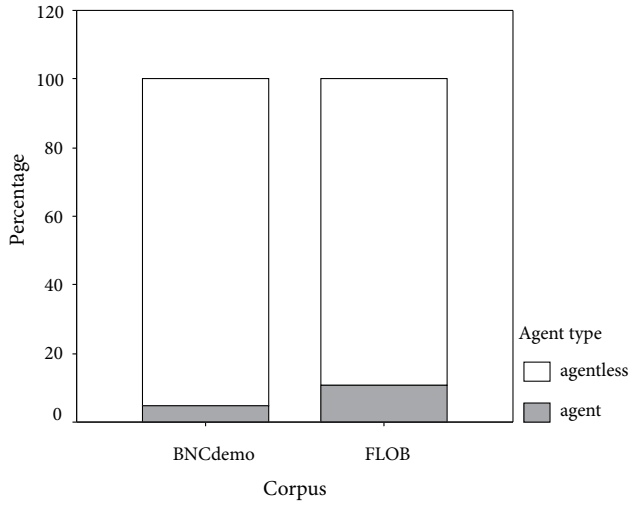

Figure 1. Long vs. short passives in written and spoken English

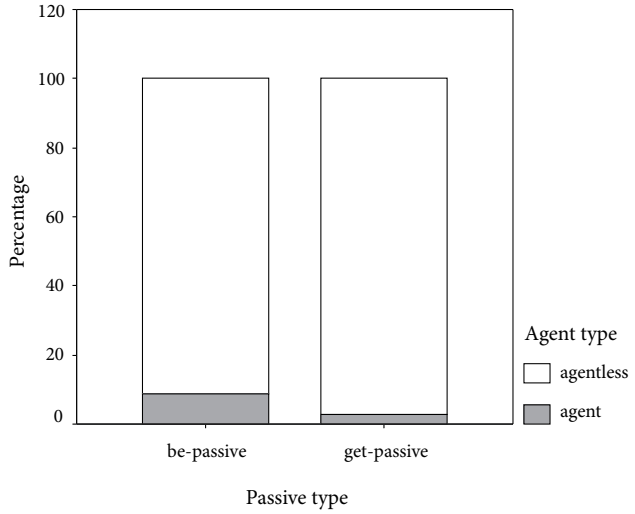

Figure 2. Long vs. short *be*/*get* passives

to further downgrade the agent and highlight the patient and event (cf. Carter and McCarthy 1999: 44), a phenomenon that we will discuss later.

2.3 Adverbials in *be* and *get* passives

Carter and McCarthy (1999: 53) observe that adverbials are rare in *get* passives and that when such adverbials do occur, they typically "have an intensifying or focusing role". Other types of adverbials (e.g. those expressing time, place and manner) are nearly non-existent unless they are semantically indispensable for adverbial complementation. This observation is generally supported by our data. Figure 3 compares the proportions of *be* (17.7%) and *get* (7%) passives with an adverbial in our corpora. Note that only adverbials occurring between *be/get* and the past participle and those following the past participle immediately were counted in this section.

While adverbials in *be* passives are not restricted by adverbial types, in *get* passives they are typically intensifying adverbials. Of the 28 instances of adverbials occurring between *get* and the past participle in our corpora, 23 are intensifying modifiers, including *a (little) bit* (7 instances), *so* (2), *really* (2), *somewhat* (2), *absolutely*, *better (known)*, *completely*, *like*, *slightly*, *sufficiently*, as well as swear words *bloody* (2) and *fucking* (2). Swear words like *fucking* are frequently used as intensifiers (cf. McEnery and Xiao 2004). The other five instances of adverbials are all informationally heavy and semantically indispensable: *accidentally*, *brutally*, *mistakenly*, *regularly* and *today*. In comparison, post-modifying adverbials are more diversified, including 7 instances of intensifiers (*at all* (2), *a bit*, *as much as*, *like*, *slightly*, *so much*), 26 instances of time adverbials (*now* (12),

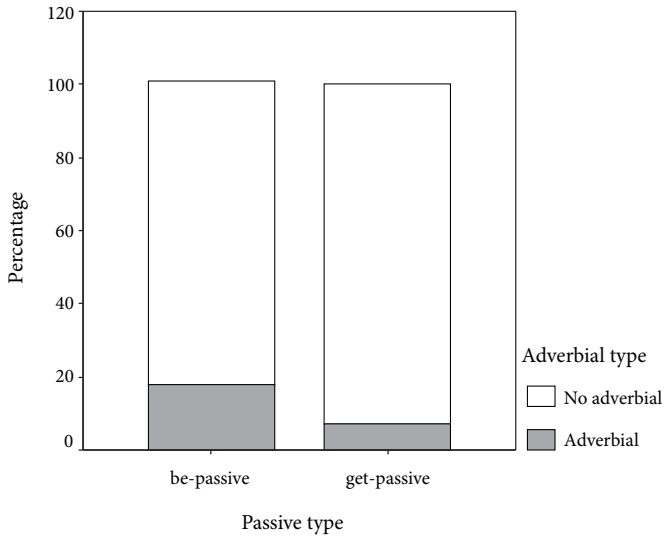

Figure 3. Passives with/without an adverbial in FLOB and BNCdemo

early/earlier (3), *today* (3), *yet* (3), *yesterday* (2), *by now*, *overnight*, *soon*), 10 instances of place adverbials (*here* (3), *there* (3), *home* (2), *outside* and *to camp*), 10 instances of manner adverbials (*quickly* (4), *together* (2), *appropriately*, *badly*, *loud* and *properly*), and finally 20 instances of other adverbials (*again* (13), *actually* (2), *once* (2), *as well* and *too*). In spite of this diversity, adverbials are significantly more frequent in *be* passives than in *get* passives in both corpora (LL=127.957 for 1 degree of freedom, $p < 0.001$). It is also of interest to note that while the proportions of *be* passives with an adverbial are very similar in the written and spoken corpora (17.3% and 19.5% for FLOB and BNCdemo respectively), the proportion of *get* passives with an adverbial in spoken English (6.6%) is significantly lower than that in written English (15.2%). Since adverbials "focus[ing] on the verb might serve to defocus the subject/patient" (Carter and McCarthy 1999: 53), the general absence of adverbials in *get* passives, like the predominance of short *get* passives, puts more emphasis on the patient. This patient-focused feature of the *get* passive is closely associated with its attitudinal nature, which we will discuss in the following section.

2.4 Semantic and pragmatic properties

As noted in Section 2.3, *get* passives are frequently used to indicate speaker attitude towards the events described, i.e. whether they have positive or negative consequences (cf. Hatcher 1949; Lakoff 1971). In contrast, *be* passives do not appear to be used in this way. To evaluate this hypothesis, we examined all instances of the *get* passive in FLOB (59 instances) and BNCdemo (1,300 instances) and compared them with 1,000 concordances of *be* passives randomly sampled from 9,908 occurrences in FLOB and 1,000 random samples from 5,001 occurrences in BNCdemo. Table 4 shows the distribution of these passive constructions across three meaning categories. As can be seen, *get* passives are indeed used more frequently to express speaker attitude — typically viewing the consequences as unfortunate.

The attitudinal role of the *get* passive is closely associated with the nature of their collocations. As we are only interested in finding out which verbs collocate with *be* and *get* passives, significant collocations are defined here as verbs

Table 4. Semantic properties of *be* and *get* passives in FLOB and BNCdemo

Passive type	Negative	Positive	Neutral
Be passives	15%	4.7%	80.3%
Get passives	37.7%	3.4%	58.9%

immediately following *be/get* with a *z* score greater than 3 and a minimum frequency of 3. In FLOB only one such collocation (*married*) was found, which is neutral. Among the collocations of the *get* passive in BNCdemo, 46.5% (33 out of a total of 71) are negative, a proportion considerably higher than those for the *be* passive in both FLOB (8%) and BNCdemo (27%). This does not mean, however, that *get* passives are more frequently negative in spoken English. In fact, they are not. The proportion of negative instances in FLOB (27 out of a total of 59, i.e. 45.8%) is higher than that in BNCdemo (485 out of 1,300, i.e. 37.3%). The relatively low proportion of negative instances in BNCdemo can be accounted for by the exceptionally high co-occurrence frequency of a few neutral verbs, most noticeably *married* (with a co-occurrence frequency of 166) and *paid* (125), *dressed* (48) and *changed* (48). Carter and McCarthy (1999: 52–53) find it unsurprising that "attitude is often strongly marked in utterances to do with money and payment, and upon the recipients of payment" because "[p]ayment, or lack of it, and how much people earn is, in most societies, a matter of interest, debate, and, not infrequently, of controversy, criticism, wonder, pleasure, and annoyance". The same can be said of marriage. Nevertheless, the attitudinal role of the *get* passive alone cannot explain why verbs like *dress* and *change*, which are not as "noteworthy" as *tell* and *ask* (*ibid*: 53), occur frequently in *get* passives. In our view, a more fundamental distinction between the two passive variants lies in that the *get* passive occurs only in dynamic events while the *be* passive can occur in both dynamic and static situations. The dynamicity of the *get* passive is so strong that even a static verb is forced to show a dynamic meaning, as shown in the contrast in (1):

(1) a. Okay to you and me tetanus **is known** by what? (BNC: KDC)
b. The key is persistence. Get your foot in the door, **get known**. You have to believe in yourself, despite the difficulties. (FLOB: F)

(2) a. It is a book which asked for trouble by taking on the establishment, and one that was written by a man who is a former Labour councillor. (FLOB: A)
b. *<…> and one that got written by a man who is a former Labour councillor.

(3) a. Go and get changed! (BNC: KD7)
b. *Go and be changed!

Semantic assimilation is possible because the class meaning of a grammatical structure can override that of individual words (Xiao and McEnery 2004). The conflict between the two results in either a semantic assimilation (1b) or

an unacceptable sentence (2b). The dynamic feature of *get* passives makes it possible for them to occur in imperatives, as shown by the contrast in (3). The difference between *be* and *get* passives in this respect is closely allied with the "state" vs. "transition" distinction between *be* and *get* as observed by Jespersen (1949: 109). As Chappell (1980) observes, the *get* passive encodes change of state. This change-of-state feature also accounts for the difference between passive variants such as *be married* and *get married*.

A further distinction between *be* and *get* passives relates to their collocates. As FLOB only provides one significant collocation of the *get* passive (i.e. *married*), we will use BNCdemo, which provides 205 collocations for the *be* passive and 71 collocations for the *get* passive. Given that the *get* passive only occurs in dynamic situations, this quantitative contrast is unsurprising. However, it does suggest that the *get* passive is more restricted in collocation. A closer inspection of their collocations reveals a stylistic difference between *be* and *get* passives. In relation to *be* passives, the *get* passive is more likely to co-occur with verbs referring to daily activities, for example, *get dressed*, *get changed*, *get weighed*, *get fed* (i.e. eat), *get washed*, and *get cleaned*, as well as with informal expressions such as *get pricked*, *get hooked*, *get mixed (up)*, *get carried (away)*, *get muddled (up)*, *get sacked*, *get kicked (out)*, *get stuffed*, *get thrown (out)*, *get chucked*, *get pissed* and *get nicked*. Some may suggest that the structures like *get dressed/changed/washed/weighed/cleaned* should be viewed as a type of pseudo-passive because they cannot take an agent — the agent and patient usually refer to the same individual. Following this analysis, *get* can be analyzed as a linking verb and the past participle as a predicative. Nevertheless, most *get*-passives do not normally take an agent introduced by a *by*-phrase (cf. Biber et al. 1999: 481). In this study we follow Quirk et al. (1985: 827) and view such structures as passives. Verbs of these two groups are rarely found among the top 100 collocations for the *be* passive in BNCdemo, suggesting that *get* passives are more informal in style than *be* passives.

The frequencies of *be/get unemployed/fired/sacked* illustrate this point well. These expressions refer to the same thing (i.e. getting out of job), but the formal way to express this idea is to use *unemployed*; *fired* is less formal while *sacked* is most colloquial. Figure 4 compares their proportions in BNCdemo. As can be seen, *unemployed* occurs most frequently in the *be* passive but is non-existent in the *get* passive while the colloquial form *sacked* is most frequent in the *get* passive. The form *fired,* which is less formal than *unemployed* but more formal than *sacked*, is found in both *be* and *get* passives. This example suggests that in contexts where both passive variants are felicitous, the *get* passive is more informal than the *be* passive (compare *be/get asked*, *be/get told*, *be/get invited*,

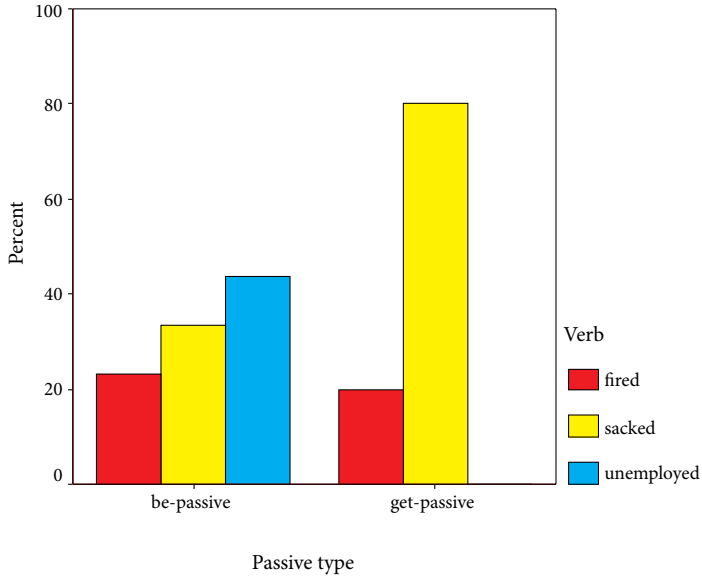

Figure 4. *Be/get unemployed/fired/sacked* in BNCdemo

be/get killed etc). Since style is closely related to genres, the next section further explores the distribution of English passives across 16 genres.

2.5 Genre distinctions

In Biber's (1988) multi-dimensional analysis of English genres, *be* passives (both long passives and short passives) are an important linguistic feature that is positively weighted on the abstract vs. non-abstract dimension. According to Biber (1988: 112, 152), genres with a high frequency of *be* passives are typically abstract and technical in content, as well as formal in style. This dimension, like those focusing on the informational vs. involved distinction on one hand, and the distinction between text-internal and text-external references on the other hand, is an important indicator of difference between oralness and literateness. Following this theory, written genres are generally expected to show higher proportions of *be* passives. This expectation is supported by our data. As can be seen from Table 5, *be* passives are over 8 times as frequent in FLOB as in BNCdemo. Among the written genres, text categories A–J typically show higher proportions of *be* passives than K–R (five types of fiction plus humour). Official documents (H) and academic prose (J), in particular, have exceptionally high proportions of *be* passives. This finding is in line with the observation

Table 5. Distribution of *be/get* passives (per 100K words)

Genre	*Be* passive	Percent	*Get* passive	Percent
A) Press reportage	952	8.33	8	7.55
B) Press editorials	919	8.04	5	4.72
C) Press reviews	557	4.87	3	2.83
D) Religion	925	8.09	0	0
E) Skills, trades and hobbies	933	8.16	14	13.21
F) Popular lore	988	8.65	7	6.6
G) Biographies and essays	838	7.33	2	1.89
H) Reports, official documents	1408	12.32	1	0.94
J) Science (academic prose)	1257	11	2	1.89
K) General fiction	416	3.64	3	2.83
L) Mistery/detective fiction	384	3.36	8	7.55
M) Science fiction	411	3.6	0	0
N) Adventure fiction	493	4.31	12	11.32
P) Romantic fiction	348	3.04	6	5.66
R) Humour	499	4.37	9	8.49
FLOB Total	853	7.46	5	4.72
BNCdemo	101	0.88	26	24.53

made by Quirk et al. (1985: 166) that passives are generally more commonly used in informative (A–J) than in imaginative writing (K–R).

As noted in Section 2.4, *get* passives typically occur in colloquial and informal genres. Table 5 shows that *get* passives are over 5 times as frequent in BNCdemo as in FLOB. Among the written genres, text category E (skills, trades and hobbies) shows an exceptionally high proportion of *get* passives because this category consists of texts about leisure and thus is informal while humour is very close to spoken language (cf. Collins 1996). In contrast, categories D (religion), H (official document), J (academic prose) and G (biographies) show relatively low proportions of *get* passives because these are typical written genres in formal style which avoid the *get* passive (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 161). Science fiction (M) has a low proportion of both *be* and *get* passives. The distribution of the two passive variants is diagrammatically shown in Figure 5, where S refers to BNCdemo.

Now let us consider more fine-grained genre distinctions relating to English passives. As *get* passives are infrequent in FLOB (only 59 instances), a breakdown of their counts across 15 genres would yield frequencies which are too low to allow for a reliable statistical analysis. Hence we will focus upon *be* passives instead. We noted in Section 2.2 that while the short forms of *be* and

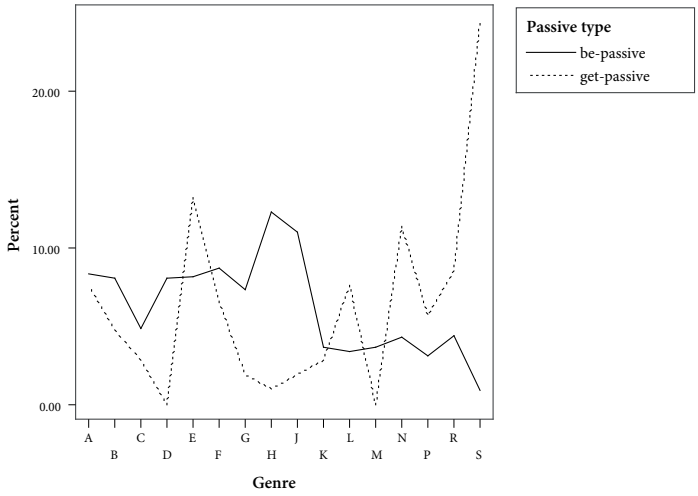

Figure 5. Distribution of *be*/*get* passives across genres

get passives are predominant in both FLOB and BNCdemo, their combined frequencies are significantly higher in spoken English. This section considers the unmarked passive form — the *be* passive alone. Figure 6 shows the distribution of long vs. short *be* passives across genres. As can be seen, long *be* passives are extremely rare in text categories D (religion), F (popular lore) and

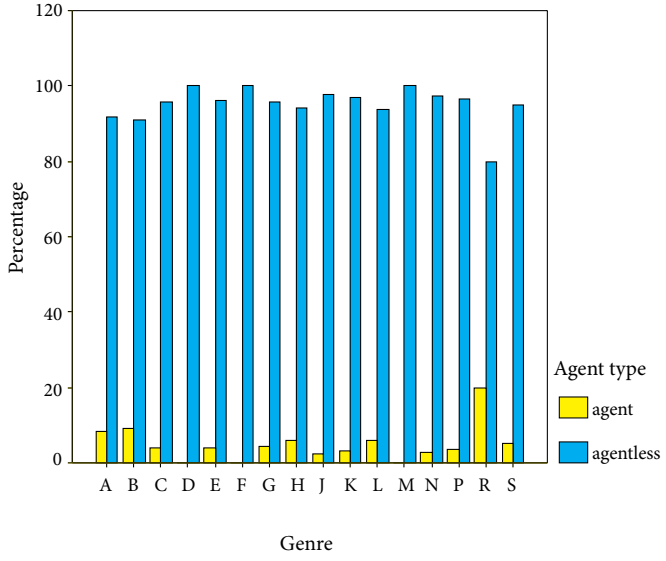

Figure 6. Distribution of long vs. short *be* passives across genres

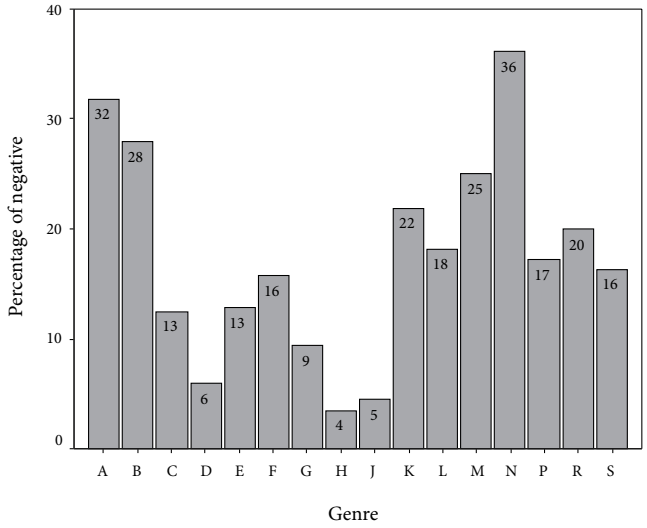

Figure 7. Proportions of negative *be* passives in 16 genres

M (science fiction) but relatively frequent (20%) in category R (humour). The proportions of long *be* passives in all other genres are very similar. It is important to note that while the overall proportion of long *be* passives (10.8%) for FLOB is higher than that for BNCdemo (5.1%), spoken English does not differ much from most written genres other than humour.

As noted earlier, *get* passives (37.7%) are used much more frequently in negative situations than *be* passives (15%). Here we will consider *be* passives alone. Figure 7 shows the proportions of negative *be* passives in 16 genres. It is clear that *be* passives are most frequently negative in text categories N (adventure fiction), A (news reportage) and B (news reviews) but are least frequently negative in categories H (official documents), J (academic prose) and D (religion). The negative proportion for the spoken genre (S) is very close to the overall negative proportion of written genres (16% and 15% respectively). This suggests that the English passive norm is typically not associated with an inflictive meaning.

2.6 Syntactic functions of English passives

This section examines the syntactic functions of English passives. The finite form exclusively functions as a predicate in a sentence/clause while the non-finite forms (e.g. infinitive and *-ing*) can either function as other sentence/clause elements or co-occur with auxiliary verbs as predicates. We examined the

Table 6. Syntactic functions of English passives

Passive type	Function	FLOB	BNCdemo	Total	Percent
Be passive	Attributive	5	3	8	0.40%
	Adverbial	6	1	7	0.35%
	Complement	10	9	19	0.95%
	Object	9	12	21	1.05%
	Subject	–	–	–	–
	Predicate	970	975	1945	97.25%
Get passive	Attributive	1	8	9	0.66%
	Adverbial	0	10	10	0.74%
	Complement	8	14	21	1.55%
	Object	5	12	17	1.25%
	Subject	1	1	2	0.15%
	Predicate	44	1255	1299	95.58%

syntactic functions of 2,000 instances of *be* passives randomly sampled from a total of 9,908 in FLOB and 5,001 in BNCdemo, as well as 59 instances of *get* passives in FLOB and 1,300 instances in BNCdemo.

The results are given in Table 6. In the table *attributive* refers to post-modifiers of nouns; *adverbial* typically refers to adverbials of purpose with an infinitive or the so-called absolute structure consisting of a noun followed by an *-ing* form; *complements* can be complementary to the subject, object or the predicate adjective. Both infinitival and *-ing* forms of passives are found in the object position, with the former as the object of a verb (e.g. *want*) and the latter as the object of a verb or preposition. Only the *-ing* form of the *get* passive was found in the subject position in the concordances we examined. It can be seen from the table that English passives (both *be* and *get* passives) are by far most frequent in the predicate position. As Biber et al. (1999: 937) observe, passive constructions are infrequent in non-finite positions in English. Non-finite forms of passives are relatively common in object and complement positions but rare in the subject position. It is also clear that the distribution of *get* passives across syntactic functions is more balanced than that of *be* passives.

In the next section, we will undertake a comparable analysis of passive constructions in Chinese, paying attention to their language specific features.

3. Passives in Chinese

3.1 Passive variants in Chinese

In relation to English, which typically uses *be* or *get* followed by a past participle to mark the passive, Chinese employs a wider range of devices to express passive meaning. The most important passive marker in Chinese is *bei*, which can mark passive constructions with or without an agent. As in Section 2, we refer to passive constructions profiling the agent as "long passives", as in (4a) and those not profiling the agent as "short passives", as in (4b) (cf. also Ting 1998). Note that the Chinese examples in this article are given in the Romanized alphabet known as *pinyin*. In grammatical glosses, ASP stands for *aspect marker*, CL for *classifier*, GEN for *genitive*, INT for *intensifier gei*, PSV for syntactic *passive marker*, PRT for *particle*, and RVC for *resultative verb complement*.

(4) a. *shishishang, tamen que yi-gege bei ren sha-le* (LCMC: N)
in-fact they but one-by-one PSV somebody kill-ASP
"But in fact, they were killed one by one (by somebody)."

b. *diren bei dabai-le* (LCMC: G)
enemy PSV defeat-ASP
"The enemy was defeated."

(5) a. *zhengzai xi de cai ye rang liushui*
ASP wash GEN vegetable also PSV flowing-water
chongzou-le (LCMC: K)
wash-away-ASP
"The vegetables she was washing were also washed away by the flowing water."

b. *zhe-xia bu jiao wo cai-zhun-le?* (LCMC: F)
this-CL not PSV I guess-right-ASP
"Haven't I guessed right this time?"

c. *wo mama ye gei ci-le* (Callhome)
I mother also PSV fire-ASP
"My mother was also fired."

d. *ta wei ta de ai suo gandong, ta jueding quanli zhichi*
she PSV he GEN love PRT move, she decide full support
ta de shiye (LCMC: P)
he GEN career
"She was moved by his love and decided to support his career fully."

(6) a. *wo rang ta tou-le liang-kuai*
I PSV/ask/allow he steal-ASP two-dollar
qian (Li and Thompson 1981)
money
"I had two dollars stolen by him/I asked (allowed) him to steal two dollars."

b. *wo jiao ta tou-le liang-kuai qian*
I PSV/order he steal-ASP two-dollar money
"I had two dollars stolen by him/I told him to steal two dollars."

c. *wo gei ta tou-le liang-kuai qian*
I PSV/for he steal-ASP two-dollar money
"I had two dollars stolen by him/I stole two dollars for him."

In both cases, *bei* is a function word with no inherent meaning other than passiveness marking. *Bei* is not a preposition as has been claimed (e.g. Chao 1968; Li S. 1994) nor is it a verb (Li R. 1980; Tang 2001). Neither is *bei* equivalent to *by* plus agent or the past participle in English passives. In our view, *bei* functions like *be/get* plus past participle in English passives to mark the patient status of the NP in the subject position. In addition to *bei*, passives in Chinese can be alternatively marked by *rang*, *jiao*, *gei* and the archaic *wei…suo* structure, as shown in (5). However, *rang*, *jiao* and *gei* have not been fully grammaticalized as passive markers because they are mainly used as lexical verbs, meaning "allow; concede", "call; order", and "give" respectively while *gei* is typically used as a dative marker that introduces the recipient or beneficiary of an action. As such, the examples in (6) are ambiguous (Li and Thompson 1981: 507). In contrast, when these less fully grammaticalized items are replaced by the full passive marker *bei*, no reading other than the passive is possible.

In addition to the fully fledged *bei* and the partly grammaticalized *rang*, *jiao* and *gei*, there are a number of lexical verbs with an inherent passive meaning including *ai* "suffer; endure", *shou* "suffer; be subjected to" and *zao* "suffer; meet with". The constructions containing such intrinsically passive verbs are referred to as "automatic passives" (Zhang 1953), as shown in (7). One important difference between these automatic passives and passive constructions marked by fully or partly grammaticalized passive markers like *bei*, *rang*, *jiao* and *gei* lies in that the former can take aspect markers whereas the latter cannot.

(7) a. *yi-ge shou-le hechi de xiaoxuesheng* (LCMC: K)
one-CL suffer-ASP berate GEN schoolchild
"a schoolchild who has been berated"

b. *youzhiyuan suishi you zao pohuai de weixian* (LCMC: G)
kindergarten any-time have suffer destroy GEN risk
"The kindergarten risked being destroyed at any time."

c. *youde haizi zai jia ai-le da, chu jiamen jiu*
some children at home suffer-ASP beat, out house-gate then
zhao ren faxie (LCMC: E)
look-for other give-vent-to
"Having been beaten up at home, some children let off their anger on others when they go out."

(8) a. *fan shao-hao-le* (Zhou and Jin 2004: 61)
meal cook-ready-ASP
"The meal is ready."

b. **fan bei shao-hao-le*
meal PSV cook-ready-ASP

(9) a. *weishengjian ni dasao-guo le ma* (Jiao and Dou 2002: 83)
bathroom you clean-RVC ASP PRT
"Have you cleaned the bathroom?"

b. **weishengjian bei ni dasao-guo le ma*
bathroom PSV you clean-RVC ASP PRT

(10) a. *zhexie tudou hen rongyi qupi* (Jiao and Dou 2002: 83)
these potato very easy peel
"These potatoes peel easily."

b. **zhexie tudou hen rongyi bei qupi*
these potato very easy PSV peel

(11) a. *qiqiu chui-po-le* (Tang 2004)
balloon blow-break-ASP
"The balloon was blown so much that it was broken."

b. *qiqiu bei chui-po-le*
balloon PSV blow-break-ASP
"The balloon was blown so much that it was broken."

(12) a. *gou bei ti-le yi-jiao* (Jiao and Dou 2002: 84)
dog PSV kick-ASP one-foot
"The dog was kicked once."

b. *gou ti-le yi-jiao*
dog kick-ASP one-foot
"The dog kicked once."

It has been observed that passives in Chinese can take the unmarked form, as exemplified in (8). Like "automatic passives" in (7), subjects in these unmarked sentences are all patients. Like those in English, constructions of this kind are often referred to as "notional passive sentences" (e.g. Jiao and Dou 2002), as opposed to syntactically marked passives. Nevertheless, instead of viewing them as passive constructions, it is equally plausible to consider these notional passives as topic sentences, where the subject arguments ("the meal", "the bathroom" and "these potatoes" in the (a) examples in (8–10) are topics while the remaining constituents are comments (cf. Li A. 1990; Shi 2000; Wu and Cann 2003). While these sentences can express the passive meaning because of the nature of their subjects, and indeed they can be turned into marked passives when a passive marker is inserted (as in 11), they are nevertheless not passive constructions in a strict sense (see Tang 2004 for a discussion of differences between the two types of sentences). In fact, it is not always possible to insert a passive marker in these sentences (compare (a) and (b) sentences in 8–10). Conversely, even though short passives may differ from so-called notional passive sentences merely by a passive marker, the marker plays a decisive role in differentiating between the active and passive voices (12) (cf. Niu 2003: 39).

As in Section 2, notional passive sentences in Chinese are excluded in this section. Rather, we will focus upon marked passives. Note that while lexical passives do not belong to the grammatical category of passive, they are nevertheless included in this section so that they can be compared with syntactic passives. The following sections will explore these alternative passive markers in terms of their syntactic features, their interaction with aspect, their semantic prosodies, and their distribution across genres.

3.2 Long vs. short passives

As noted in the previous section, there are long and short passives in Chinese. Long passives take an agent while short passives do not. Table 7 gives the frequencies of long and short passives in the LCMC and Callhome corpora. It also shows the proportions of these syntactic and lexical passive markers in the total occurrences in the two corpora. As can be seen, the archaic structure *wei…suo* is typically (accounting for 60% of its total occurrences) used in modern Chinese as a passive marker (e.g. 5d), though it can also be used in the active voice. Starting in the Tang dynasty, *wei* was gradually replaced by *bei* (cf. Li S. 1994: 2). Of the total instances of *bei* 87.3% are used as a passive marker, a proportion which is considerably higher than those for *gei*, *jiao* and *rang*, reflecting the much higher degree of grammaticalization of *bei* over the other

Table 7. Long and short passives in LCMC and Callhome

Passive type	Passive Marker	% of total occurrences	Long passive		Short passive	
			Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Syntactic passive	*bei*	87.3%	511	39.3%	789	60.7%
	wei…suo	60.0%	69	100.0%	–	–
	gei	1.5%	17	42.5%	23	57.5%
	jiao	0.4%	4	100.0%	–	–
Lexical passive	*rang*	1.6%	15	100.0%	–	–
	ai	52.6%	1	3.3%	29	96.7%
	shou	60.4%	132	31.9%	282	68.1%
	zao	82.0%	34	37.4%	57	62.6%

three syntactic passive markers. The three lexical passive markers are used mainly in "automatic passives". *Bei* and *gei* can occur in both long and short passives, but it is more likely that they do not take an agent while *wei…suo* is typically found in long passives. In contrast, *jiao* and *rang* only occur with an agent in long passives (cf. Shi 1997: 51; Tang 2001: 279–280), as shown by the contrast in (13) and (14).

(13) a. *chufei lian ni de linghun ye jiao ta zhanyou-le*,
unless even you GEN soul also PSV she occupy-ASP,
ta shi bu hui gandao manzu de (LCMC: P)
she is not will feel satisfy PRT
"Unless even your soul is also occupied by her, she will not feel satisfied."

b. * *chufei lian ni de linghun ye jiao zhanyou-le…*
unless even you GEN soul also PSV occupy-ASP…

(14) a. *xiang zhao ren wen, you pa rang ren qiaobuqi* (LCMC: R)
want look-for other ask but fear PSV other look-down-upon
"(He) wanted to ask someone, but was afraid of being despised by others."

b. * *xiang zhao ren wen, you pa rang qiaobuqi*
want look-for other ask but afraid PSV look-down-upon

(15) a. *ta jing bei qinjia gei pian-le* (LCMC: P)
she eventually PSV in-laws INT cheat-ASP
"She was eventually taken in by her in-laws."

b. *wo ma jiao che gei zhuang-shang-le* (Shi 1997: 50)
I mom PSV car INT hit-wound-ASP
"My mom was injured by a car."

c. *huoren bu neng rang niao gei bie-si-le* (LCMC: A)
the-living not can PSV piss INT hold-die-ASP
"The living should not die of refraining from using the restroom (i.e. one must be flexible)."

It has been observed that *bei*, *jiao* and *rang* can co-occur with *gei* in long passives (e.g. 15). *Gei* in these examples is different from its passive usage. In this context, *gei* is an intensifying particle that reinforces the disposal *ba* construction and syntactic passives (cf. Li and Thompson 1981; Li W. 2004). Its function is comparable to the particle *suo* in the passive construction "*wei…suo*" in classic Chinese, which is replaced by *bei … suo/gei* in modern Chinese. Li W. (2004) observes that the intensifying function of *gei* developed at the end of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). This intensifying usage of *gei* is referred to in Tang (2001: 284) as an "affectedness marker" that reinforces the meaning of affectedness in these constructions. Hence, while examples in (15) can be rewritten felicitously by removing *gei*, the rewritten sentences will lose the emphatic flavour existing in the original sentences. In some instances, however, *gei* in the "*gei* + pronoun" structure can be interpreted either as an intensifier or as a passive marker even in the same construction depending on the context (cf. Zhang 1999: 81), as shown in the glosses in (16). This is perhaps because the intensifying *gei* can be understood as the shortened form of the "*gei* + pronoun" structure; as Tang (2001: 286) observes, "the affectedness marker *gei* in Mandarin was derived by incorporating the pronoun into *gei* by 'radical' contraction". Unsurprisingly, therefore, the example in (17) allows a number of readings.

(16) a. *(duibuqi,) qianbi gei-ni nongdiu-le* (Zhang 1999: 81)
(sorry,) pencil INT-you lose-ASP
"Sorry, I lost your pencil."
b. *(ni kan,) qianbi gei ni nongdiu-le ba*
(you look,) pencil PSV you lose-ASP PRT
Literal: "Look, the pencil was lost by you."

(17) *lao niu gei ta la-zou-le* (Huang 1996: 667)
old cow PSV/INT/for he pull-away-ASP
"The old cow was pulled away by him."
"The old cow was pulled away."
"The old cow was pulled away for him."

(18) a. *xiaoxue shi, wo jingchang ai huai haizimen*
primary-school when I often suffer bad children
[*de*] *da* (Li M. 2001: 44)
[GEN] beat
"I was often beaten by bad children when I was in primary school."
b. *guli xitong bu shou waijie* [*de*] *yingxiang* (LCMC: J)
isolate system not suffer outside [GEN] influence
"An isolated system is not influenced by the outside world."
c. *lü zao waiguo* [*de*] *qinlüe* (LCMC: G)
repeatedly suffer foreign-country [GEN] invade
"(China) was invaded by foreign countries time and again."

(19) a. *beizi bei/gei/jiao/rang ta dapo le* (Zhou 2004: 14)
cup PSV he break ASP
"The cup was broken by him."
b. * *beizi bei/gei/jiao/rang ta de dapo-le*
cup PSV he GEN break-ASP

It appears that of the three lexical passive markers, *ai* occurs predominantly in short passives while *shou* and *zao* frequently occur without an agent. Note, however, that as *ai*, *shou* and *zao* are verbs, the agent NPs in automatic passives can equally be interpreted as attributive modifiers of nominalized verbs, but this interpretation is impossible in syntactic passives with the four syntactic passive markers, as shown in (18–19).

3.3 Syntactic functions

Another difference in the syntactic features of these passive markers is that they have different probabilities of functioning as different sentence constituents. Unlike English, which has the finite vs. non-finite distinction, Chinese does not formally differentiate between these two forms. Hence, Chinese passive constructions can be either finite or non-finite (even though in reality finite uses, e.g., as predicates, are more common. See 3.4 below). In addition to functioning as a predicate, as shown in the examples in the previous sections, a passive construction in Chinese can occur in a sentence as the subject (20a) or object (20b), or as an attributive (20c) or adverbial (20d) modifier. Passive constructions are also likely to occur in nominal phrases such as *bei boxue zhe* "the exploited", *bei tongzhi jieji* "the ruled class", and *bei qinhai ren* "victim", though the distinction between the nominal and attributive uses is not always clear-cut.

(20) a. *er ziji diyi-ci bei hushi, geng shi ta you-le*
and self first-time PSV ignore, more make she have-ASP
shenchen de shiluo (LCMC: P)
deep GEN loss
"And her being ignored for the first time made her feel even more deeply lost."

b. *mengjian bei gou yao shang, yuzhao bei ren wuxian*
dream-of PSV dog bite wound presage PSV people frame
feibang (LCMC: D)
slander
"Dreaming of being bitten by a dog is a sign of being framed and slandered."

c. *zai bei qiuji de 12-tian li, Sun Yat-Sen sihu gandao*
during PSV imprison GEN 12-day in Sun Yat-Sen appear feel
juewang (LCMC: G)
despair
"During the 12 days he was imprisoned, Sun Yat-Sen appeared to feel despaired."

d. *ke zhe yiqie, que yin die bei guanya er jieshu-le* (LCMC: K)
but this all but because dad PSV lock-up then finish-ASP
"But all of this came to an end because of dad's imprisonment."

Table 8 gives the frequencies of passive constructions with these different syntactic functions in the LCMC and Callhome corpora. As the passive is a verb construction, it can be expected that passive constructions are primarily used as predicates in sentences/clauses. The table shows that apart from this primary use, the attributive use appears to be the second most important syntactic function of passive constructions in Chinese. It can also be seen that passive constructions marked syntactically and lexically can be used as objects. Adverbial uses are found only in passive constructions with *bei* and *shou* while with all passive markers, the subject uses are rare. The statistics suggest that in terms of syntactic functions, the differences in the distribution of syntactic and lexical passives in Chinese are marginal. Our data show that passive constructions typically do not function as complementary elements in Chinese.

3.4 Interaction between passives and aspect

Passive constructions syntactically marked by *bei* etc. are closely linked to aspect. For example, syntactic passives in Chinese convey an aspectual meaning of result that cannot be cancelled when they interact with perfective aspects

Table 8. Syntactic functions of passive constructions in Chinese

Marker	Predicate	Subject	Object	Attributive	Adverbial	Nominal	Total
bei	966	12	34	194	58	36	1300
	74.3%	0.9%	2.6%	14.9%	4.5%	2.8%	66.2%
wei…suo	66	–	–	3	–	–	69
	95.7%			4.3%			3.5%
gei	39	–	1	–	–	–	40
	97.5%		2.5%				2.1%
jiao	4	–	–	–	–	–	4
	100%						0.2%
rang	14	–	1	–	–	–	15
	93.3%		6.7%				0.8%
Syntactic	*1089*	*12*	*36*	*197*	*58*	*36*	*1428*
total	*76.3%*	*0.8%*	*2.5%*	*13.8%*	*4.1%*	*2.5%*	
ai	21	2	2	5	–	–	30
	70.0%	6.7%	6.7%	16.6%			1.5%
shou	309	9	10	61	22	3	414
	74.6%	2.2%	2.4%	14.8%	5.3%	0.7%	21.1%
zao	69	1	3	11	7	–	91
	75.8%	1.1%	3.3%	12.1%	7.7%		4.6%
Lexical	*399*	*12*	*15*	*77*	*29*	*3*	*535*
total	*74.6%*	*2.2%*	*2.8%*	*14.4%*	*5.4%*	*0.6%*	
Total/	1488	24	51	274	87	39	1963
Average	75.8%	1.2%	2.6%	14.0%	4.4%	2.0%	100%

(see Xiao and McEnery 2004). Table 9 shows the interaction between syntactic and lexical passives with various aspect-related constructions.

In addition to the perfective aspect markers *-le*, *-guo* and the imperfective aspect marker *-zhe*, resultative verb complements (RVCs) in Chinese contribute to both situation aspect and viewpoint aspect in that they typically express a telic notion and grammatically mark the completive aspect (see Xiao and McEnery 2004). The structure "verb + *de* + complement" can denote either resultativeness or manner, but only the resultative *de*-structure is relevant to aspect, as in *bei da-de biqing-lianzhong* "have one's face bashed in". Negation is relevant here because some aspect markers do not occur in negative sentences. For example, *-le* is replaced by *mei/meiyou* "not" when a sentence is negated. All other instances were considered as bare passive constructions. Note that in syntactic passives, aspect markers, RVCs or the resultative *de*-structure follow the verb phrases preceded by passive markers such as *bei* rather than the passive marker *per se* (cf. *bei piping-le* vs. **bei-le piping* "was criticized") while they can follow *ai*, *shou* and *zao* in lexical passives (e.g. cf. *ai/shou/zao-le piping* vs.

Table 9. Interaction between passives and aspect

Marker	–le	–zhe	–guo	RVC	de-result	negation	Bare	Total
bei	213	19	4	462	48	50	504	1300
	16.4%	1.5%	0.3%	35.5%	3.7%	3.8%	38.8%	66.2%
wei…suo	–	–	–	–	–	5	64	69
						7.2%	92.8%	3.5%
gei	19	1	–	11	5	–	4	40
	47.5%	2.5%		27.5%	12.5%		10.0%	2.1%
jiao	3	–	–	–	–	–	1	4
	75%						25%	0.2%
rang	6	–	–	2	–	4	3	15
	40%			13.3%		26.7%	20%	0.8%
Syntactic	*241*	*20*	*4*	*475*	*53*	*59*	*576*	*1428*
total	*16.9%*	*1.4%*	*0.3%*	*33.3%*	*3.7%*	*4.1%*	*40.3%*	
ai	7	–	1	2	–	–	20	30
	23.3%		3.3%	6.7%			66.7%	1.5%
shou	42	4	12	–	–	37	319	414
	10.1%	1.0%	2.9%			8.9%	77.1%	21.1%
zao	11	2	1	–	–	–	77	91
	12.1%	2.2%	1.1%				84.6%	4.6%
Lexical	*60*	*6*	*14*	*2*	–	*37*	*416*	*535*
total	*11.2%*	*1.1%*	*2.6%*	*0.4%*		*6.9%*	*77.8%*	
Total/	301	26	18	477	53	96	992	1963
Average	15.3%	1.3%	0.9%	24.3%	2.7%	4.9%	50.6%	100%

ai/shou/zao piping-le "was criticized"). Negative adverbs *mei/meiyou/bu* always precede passive markers in both syntactic and lexical passive constructions. The archaic passive form *wei…suo* does not take aspect markers; it co-occurs with negative adverbs because negation is part of the intended meaning. It can be seen from the table that bare forms account for the largest proportions of syntactic and lexical passives. Of the three aspect markers, *-le* is most frequently used in both types, followed by *-zhe* and *-guo*, mirroring the distribution pattern of the three aspect markers in the two corpora –12,368 instances of *-le*, 3,654 instances of *-zhe* and 939 instances of *-guo*. However, there are important differences between syntactic and lexical passives in their interaction with aspect. RVCs and the resultative *de*-structure generally occur more frequently in syntactic passives while the bare forms are considerably more common in lexical passives. RVCs are less frequent in lexical passives because over 40% of instances of *shou* and *zao* are found in disyllabic words *shoudao* and *zaodao*, where *dao* functions like an RVC but is not counted as such in this article.

Table 10. A breakdown of syntactic functions and aspect markers in *bei* passives

Marker	Predicate	Subject	Object	Attributive	Adverbial	Nominal	Total
–le	199	–	2	11	1	–	213
	20.6%		5.9%	5.7%	1.7%		16.4%
–guo	2	–	1	1	–	–	4
	0.2%		2.9%	0.5%			0.3%
RVCs	392	2	4	55	9	–	462
	40.6%	16.7%	11.8%	28.3%	15.5%		35.5%
–zhe	16	–	–	3	–	–	19
	1.6%			1.5%			1.5%
de-result	45	–	–	3	–	–	48
	4.7%			1.5%			3.7%
Negation	38	–	2	9	1	–	50
	3.9%		5.9%	4.6%	1.7%		3.8%
Bare	274	10	25	112	47	36	504
	28.4%	83.3%	73.5%	57.7%	81.1%	100%	38.8%
Total	966	12	34	194	58	36	1300
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The bare forms in syntactically marked passives are less frequent because passive constructions of this type typically encode a result, which is made visible by viewpoint aspects. Bare verbs are uncommon in syntactic passives, especially when the passive constructions function as predicates. To illustrate this point, let us consider passives marked by *bei*. Table 10 gives a breakdown of syntactic functions and aspect markers in *bei* passives. As can be seen, whilst passive constructions functioning as nominal phrases, subjects, objects or adverbial modifiers usually do not interact with aspect, bare forms are considerably less frequent in passive constructions in the predicate position. A closer look at the bare forms in the predicate position shows that such bare passives typically occur in the following contexts, which are often associated with the omission of aspect markers in Chinese discourse:

- a preceding modal auxiliary such as *hui* "will", *neng/nenggou* "can", *yuanyi* "be willing to" and *keyi* "may";
- a preceding time adverbial such as *yi/yijing* "already", *jiang* "will", *jiuyao/yao* "will";
- the *shi…de* structure;
- the archaic form *bei…suo*;
- reporting and commanding verbs such as *gaozhi* "tell", *zhishi* "instruct", *ming* "order", *pilu* "expose", *xuangao* "declare", and *pan* "sentence";

- idiomatic verb phrases such as *juzhimenwai* "refuse", *gegejipo* "destroy one by one", *qianggouyikong* "sell out" and *xijieyikong* "loot";
- a (patient) subject preceded by *you* "have", as in *you yi jumin bei sha* "One resident was killed";
- coordinated predicates, e.g. *yi-ge bei sha, yi-ge ren aidao* "one was killed, another was wounded by a knife";
- a following complementary element such as a prepositional phrase;
- and the sentence-final change-of-state *le*.

3.5 Semantic prosodies

In addition to syntactic features, passive variants in Chinese also differ in their semantic properties. It has been noted that passive constructions in Chinese are "usually of unfavourable meanings" (Chao 1968: 703) in addition to their passive meaning. This is perhaps because the prototypical passive marker *bei* was derived from its main verb usage meaning "suffer" (Wang 1957). However, Chinese passives have been influenced by Western languages so that they are no longer restricted to verbs with an inflictive meaning (*ibid*), especially in written language. In other words, language contact and language change have turned the unfavourable connotation of passive constructions into a negative semantic prosody, which is essentially a collocational meaning (cf. Xiao and McEnery 2006).

Table 11 shows the distribution of passive markers across meaning categories. Note that the affective meanings of passive constructions can be interpreted not only in relation to the patient subject, but also to the speaker or people concerned when the patient subject is inanimate (cf. Li S. 1994: 20). It can be seen from the table that Chinese passives more often than not display a negative semantic prosody. The lexical passives marked by *ai* and *zao* are always negative because infliction is a connotative meaning inherent in the two verbs. In relation to *bei*, the archaic form *wei…suo* shows a less pronounced propensity for negative semantic prosodies because *wei*, unlike *bei*, does not have an inflictive meaning, whilst *gei* is more likely to express unfavourable situations because "the semantics of *gei* 'give' is often to offer something at the giver's cost instead of being benefactive to the giver" (Yin 2004). It has been observed that the influence of Western languages on Chinese passives has largely been confined to written language (Li S. 1994: 19) and that *jiao*, *rang* and *gei* are colloquial passive markers (Wang 1957). Based on these observations, the three alternative passive markers are expected to be used more frequently than *bei* in detrimental situations. Nevertheless, while *gei* appears to show such a tendency, we cannot draw a firm conclusion from our limited data.

Table 11. Chinese passive markers across meaning categories

Passive Type	Passive marker	Negative		Positive		Neutral	
		Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent	Freq	Percent
Syntactic passive	*bei*	670	51.5%	139	10.7%	491	37.8%
	wei…suo	13	18.9%	27	39.1%	29	42.0%
	gei	27	67.5%	3	7.5%	10	25.0%
	jiao	2	50.0%	1	25.0%	1	25.0%
	rang	10	66.7%	4	26.7%	1	6.6%
Lexical Passive	*ai*	30	100.0%	0	–	0	–
	shou	269	65.0%	100	24.1%	45	10.9%
	zao	91	100.0%	0	–	0	–

Significant collocations of *bei* (with a *z*-score greater than 3.0 and a minimum frequency of 3 within the L0–R4 window) in the LCMC corpus include 31 verbs with a negative meaning (e.g. *bang* "truss up", *jie* "rob", *pian* "cheat" and *sha* "kill"), six verbs with a positive meaning (e.g. *pingwei* "choose…as", *yuwei* "honour…as", *tisheng* "promote" and *feng* "confer (a title)"), and 24 verbs that are neutral (e.g. *chengwei* "call", *renming* "appoint" and *anpai* "arrange"). No significant collocations were found for the other three syntactic passive markers in our data. The collocations of *shou* include five negative verbs (*xianzhi* "constrain", *zhiyue* "restrict", *ciji* "stimulate; irritate", *yingxiang* "affect, impair" and *chongji* "attack, assault") and two positive verbs (*huanying* "welcome" and *zhongshi* "attach importance to"). Only two verb collocations were found for *zao* (*pohuai* "destroy" and *jujue* "refuse"), both of which are negative; no significant collocations were found for *ai* in our data. These collocations confirm the distribution of passive markers across meaning categories as observed in Table 11 and appear to suggest that passive constructions in Chinese are largely inflictive in nature.

3.6 Genre distinctions

This section explores the distribution of passive constructions across genres by focusing on syntactically marked passives. As the samples for different genres vary in size, the frequencies have been normalized to a common basis for easy comparison. Table 12 shows the normalized frequencies (per 100,000 words) of passive markers in 15 written genres covered in LCMC and the spoken genre in Callhome.

As can be seen, the average frequency of syntactic passive markers is over 11 times as frequent in LCMC as in Callhome, suggesting that in relation to

Table 12. Normalised frequencies of Chinese passive markers (per 100K words)

Genre	bei	wei… suo	gei	jiao	rang	ai	shou	zao	*Syn. total*	*Total*
A	149	5	–	1	2	2	31	12	*157*	*202*
B	95	7	–	–	–	2	50	15	*102*	*169*
C	38	6	–	–	–	–	41	20	*44*	*105*
D	206	41	–	–	–	–	73	12	*247*	*332*
E	73	4	–	–	–	3	50	1	*77*	*131*
F	128	8	–	1	–	2	50	17	*137*	*206*
G	177	8	–	–	2	2	30	10	*187*	*229*
H	51	–	–	–	–	–	33	5	*51*	*89*
J	105	12	–	–	–	–	62	6	*117*	*185*
K	156	–	3	–	2	7	21	5	*161*	*194*
L	221	–	2	2	2	2	22	12	*227*	*263*
M	138	9	–	–	–	–	16	–	*147*	*163*
N	134	2	22	–	3	10	24	5	*161*	*200*
P	118	3	5	2	2	3	13	7	*130*	*153*
R	70	–	11	–	11	32	16	5	*92*	*145*
S	6	–	5	–	1	–	7	–	*12*	*19*
Written	*127*	*7*	*2*	*–*	*1*	*3*	*39*	*9*	*137*	*188*
All	*99*	*5*	*3*	*–*	*1*	*2*	*32*	*7*	*108*	*149*

(Notes: S = Callhome spoken corpus; Written = A-R; All = both written and spoken)

written Chinese, passive constructions are considerably less frequent in spoken Chinese. The overall low frequency of passives in spoken Chinese might suggest that speakers simply try to avoid using passives as much as possible, perhaps because of their negative semantic prosodies (see discussion below). Of the written genres, passive constructions are most frequent in religions texts (D) and mystery/detective stories (L) but least frequent in news editorials (C) and official documents (H), as shown in Figure 8. It can also be seen from the figure that while lexical passive markers show some differences in distrubution from syntactic passives, they will not change the overall distribution pattern to a great extent because of their relatively low frequencies.

We noted earlier that in English *be* passives are very common in official documents (H) and academic prose (J), though the frequencies of *get* passives are relatively low in these genres. In Chinese, however, passive constructions are infrequent in these two genres (see Figure 8). This is perhaps because English passives (more specifically, *be* passives) function to mark objectivity and a formal style whereas passives in Chinese do not have this function.

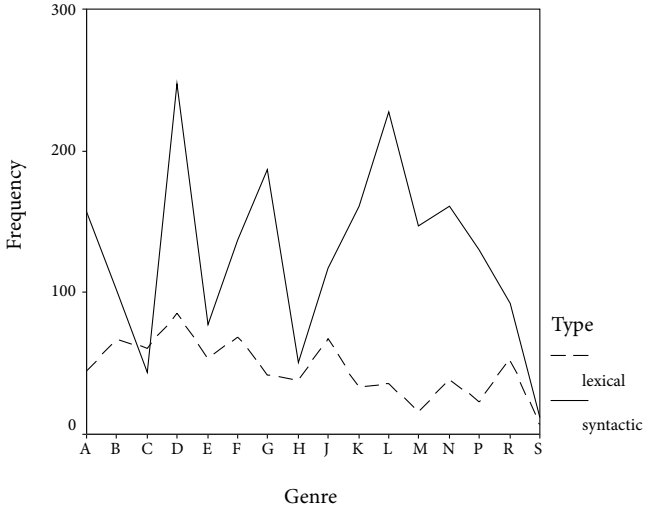

Figure 8. Overall distribution of passive markers

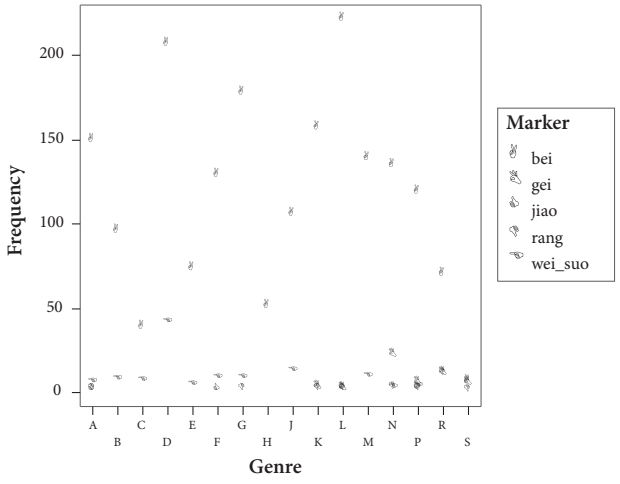

Figure 9. Distribution of syntactic passives

Figure 9 shows the distribution of five syntactic passive markers across the 16 genres under consideration. It is clear that *bei* is found in all genres — it is a "universal" passive marker in Chinese; *wei…suo* occurs only in written genres while *gei*, *jiao* and *rang* are generally rare in written genres barring martial arts fiction (N) and humour (R). Martial arts stories represent a distinctive genre in that they are written in a form of vernacular Chinese; humour is a colloquial genre that is very similar to spoken language. Even though it has been observed

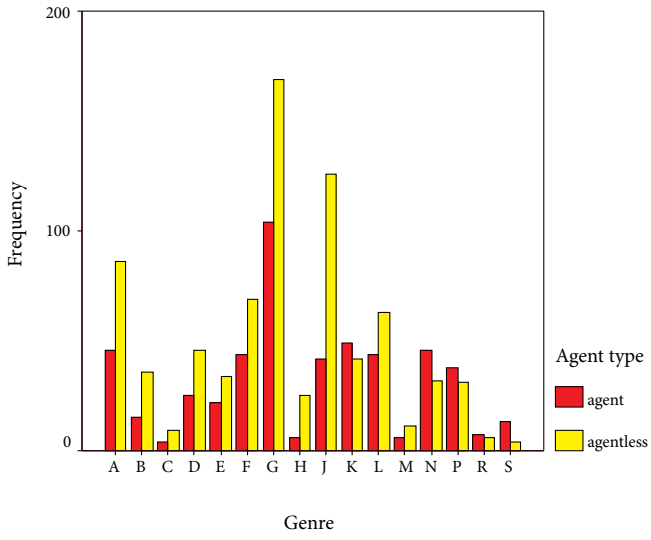

Figure 10. Distribution of long vs. short *bei* passives

by many scholars that the function of *bei* is carried out by other passive markers like *gei*, *jiao* and *rang* in spoken Chinese (e.g. Hu 1993; Zhang and Fang 1996), these passive variants do not occur frequently in our spoken corpus either, perhaps because *jiao* and *rang* are typically used in Northern dialects (cf. Wu and Zhou 2004: 67–68) while *gei* typically occurs in Southern dialects (Li S. 1994: 2; Ding and Cao 2000: 76).

The remainder of this section explores the "universal" passive marker *bei* in more detail. We will first examine the long and short forms of *bei* passives. Figure 10 shows the distribution of the two forms across the 16 genres under consideration. As can be seen, the contrast between the two forms is typically less marked in various kinds of fiction (K–P), humour (R) and speech (S); in some of these genres (K, P, R and S), long passives are even more frequent than short passives. As fiction and humour are close to spoken language in many respects, one can reasonably speculate that Chinese speakers tend to use long passives in speech and colloquial genres but short passives in typical written genres such as academic prose (J), official documents (H) and biographies (G).

Li Z. (2004: 9) found on the basis of a corpus of newspaper and a corpus of literary texts that the proportion of negative uses of *bei* passives in literary texts is considerably greater than in newspaper texts (86.18% vs. 57%). This finding is generally supported by our data which shows proportions of 51.5% and 66% for news (A–C) and literary (K–P) texts respectively. But our data reveals more fine-grained genre distinctions also. As can be seen in Figure 11, even different

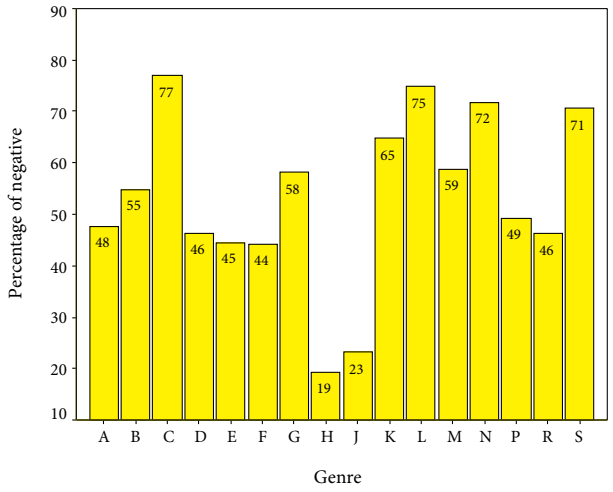

Figure 11. Proportions of negative *bei* passives

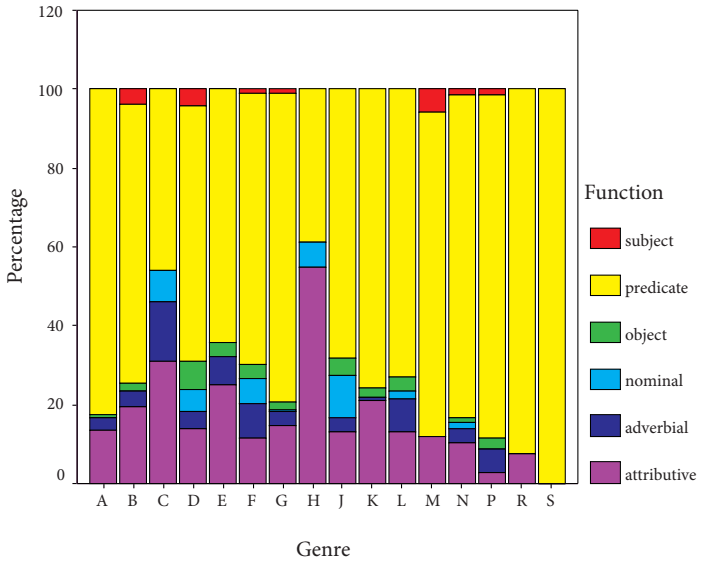

Figure 12. Syntactic functions of *bei* constructions

types of news and literary texts can show marked differences. For newspaper texts, news editorials are more likely to use *bei* passives negatively while for literary texts, mystery/detective stories and martial arts fiction tend to use *bei* passives in a negative sense more frequently. *Bei* passives are also predominantly negative in speech. In contrast, they do not show a negative semantic

prosody frequently in official documents and academic prose. In general, it is clear that fiction of various kinds and humour bear a closer resemblance to speech than other genres in our corpora as far as the semantic prosodies of *bei* passive constructions are concerned.

We noted earlier that passive constructions are infrequent in official documents (H) and when used, they do not usually show a negative semantic prosody. Another peculiarity of this genre, as can be seen from Figure 12, is that the proportion of attributive use of passive constructions — in this case, *bei* passives — is exceptionally high in relation to other genres. While the predicate use of *bei* constructions is frequent in all genres, fiction (K–P) and humour (R) are generally closer to speech (S). News reportage (A) is also very similar because this category includes some written-to-be-spoken scripts for radio and television broadcasting.

We have so far provided a quantitative analysis of passive constructions in English and Chinese separately. The section that follows will approach passives in the two languages from a contrastive perspective on the basis of this analysis.

4. A contrastive analysis of passives in English and Chinese

This section contrasts syntactically marked passive constructions in Chinese and *be/get* passives in English since lexical passives in Chinese, in a strict sense, do not belong to the grammatical category of passive. While it is clear that constructions marked by *be/get* plus a past participle in English and *bei/jiao/rang/gei* in Chinese both express a basic passive meaning, there are nevertheless a range of differences between the two languages. It is important to note, however, that many of the differences discussed below are quantitative rather than qualitative, reflecting the statistical norms of passives in English and Chinese.

4.1 Overall frequencies

The first obvious difference, as noted previously, is that syntactic passives are by far more frequent in English than in Chinese. There are 995 instances of *be* passives and 31 instances of *get* passives per 100,000 words in FLOB and BNCdemo, with a total normalized frequency of 1,026. In contrast, there are 1,428 instances syntactic passives (1,300 instances of *bei*, 69 instances of *wei… suo*, 40 instances of *gei*, 15 instances of *rang* and 4 instances of *jiao*) in 1.3 million words of texts from LCMC and Callhome, producing a normalized

frequency of 110. Passive constructions are nearly 10 times as frequent in English as in Chinese. Note that the frequency for the English data only includes passive constructions without an intervening adverbial. If occurrences with intervening adverbials were also counted, the frequency for English would be much greater and an even more marked contrast would be expected.

A number of reasons can be mentioned which help to account for this contrast between English and Chinese. Firstly, as the *be* passive originated from the predicative structure (i.e. a copular verb followed by a subject predicative), this unmarked passive form can be used for both static and dynamic situations while Chinese passives can only occur in dynamic events. Secondly, Chinese passives typically have a negative semantic prosody (see further discussion below) while English passives (especially *be* passives) do not. Finally, English has a tendency to overuse passives, especially in formal writing, whereas Chinese tends to avoid syntactic passives wherever possible. It has been pointed out that English (official documents, scientific writing and news reportage in particular) "is so addicted to the passive voice that you must constantly alert yourself against its drowsy, impersonal pomp" (Baker 1985: 121) and the excessive use of passives has been criticized by many scholars including Quirk (1968: 170).

In a parallel corpus composed of one quarter million English words and over 400,000 Chinese words, only about 20% of *be* passives are translated into Chinese using syntactically marked passive constructions, with the majority being translated using so-called notional passives, subjectless sentences, sentences with vague subjects (e.g. *youren* "someone", *renmen* "people", *dajia* "all") and special sentences (e.g. the disposal *ba* construction and the predicative *shi…de* structure). Given that Chinese passives are much more restricted in use than their English counterparts, their relatively low frequency is hardly surprising.

4.2 Agents in long passives

The agent in the long passive in English is introduced by *by*, which is left out together with the agent in the short passive. In Chinese the agent is introduced by *bei* in the long passive while in short passive, only the agent, but not *bei*, is omitted because *bei* plays the double role of marking passive constructions as well as introducing the agent. It is also apparent that the agent in the long passive normally follows the passivized verb in English but occurs before the verb in Chinese.

We noted in Section 2 that short passives typically account for over 90% of total occurrences of *be/get* passives in both written and spoken English, a

proportion slightly higher than what was observed by Quirk et al. (1985: 164) — "approximately four out of five English passive sentences have no expressed agent". In Chinese, as noted earlier, three out of five syntactic passive markers (*wei…suo*, *jiao* and *rang*) only occur in long passives. For the two remaining passive markers *bei* and *gei* which allow both long and short passives, the proportions of short passives (60.7% and 57.5% respectively) are significantly lower than those for English passives. Early Chinese grammarians such as Wang (1984) and Lü and Zhu (1979) noted that an agent must normally be spelt out in passive constructions, though this constraint has become more relaxed nowadays, as can be seen in Section 3.2. That may explain why a vague expression such as *ren* "someone" and *renmen* "people" is often specified when it is difficult to spell out the agent. In the LCMC corpus, there are 58 instances of *ren/renmen* "someone/people" as the agent without a modifier, and all of these can be optionally removed without causing loss of information. In contrast, the agents in English long passives are rarely those informationally light vague words such as *someone*, *somebody* or *people* without a post-modifier. In FLOB, for example, there are seven instances of *by people*, six of which have a post-modifier or are followed by a clause where the agent NP also functions as the subject; and of the five instances of *by somebody/someone*, three have a post-modifier.

4.3 Semantic properties

A major distinction between passive constructions in the two languages under consideration is that Chinese passives are more frequently used with an inflictive meaning than English passives. With the exception of the archaic form *wei…suo*, over 50% of passive constructions marked by all syntactic passive markers in Chinese occur in adversative situations, a proportion considerably higher than that for English passives (15% for *be* passives and 37.7% for *get* passives). We noted earlier that the prototypical passive marker *bei* was derived from a verb with an inflictive meaning. As such, Chinese passives were used at early stages primarily for unpleasant or undesirable events. While this semantic constraint on the use of passives has become more relaxed, especially in written Chinese, under the influence of western languages, disyllabic words made up of *bei* and a single character verb as used in modern Chinese typically refer to something undesirable, as in *beibu* "be arrested", *beifu* "be captured", *beigao* "the accused", *beihai* "be a victim" and *beipo* "be forced". In this respect, the *get* passive is closer to Chinese passives than the unmarked passive *be* passive, because the use of *be* passives is more stylistically oriented, i.e. to make the

discourse sound more impersonal, objective, formal and technical. Marking negative semantic prosodies is not a basic feature of English passives. Hence unsurprisingly, of the three meaning categories discussed in previous sections, the neutral use of passives is predominant in English, followed by negative and positive categories whereas for Chinese, the order is different: negative, neutral and positive (cf. Li Z. 2004: 11). In conclusion, positive categories of passive constructions are infrequent in both languages, while the difference consists in how much negativity is coded in them.

4.4 Syntactic functions

As passives are basically verb constructions, they are most frequently used as predicates in both English and Chinese. However, the proportion of passive constructions as predicates in English (over 95%) is much higher than that in Chinese (76% on average), though there are great variations in such proportions for different passive markers in Chinese. While passives are more frequent in the object than subject position in both languages, they often function as attributive modifiers in Chinese but as complements in English. In general passive constructions in Chinese (*bei* passives in particular) are more balanced across syntactic functions than English passives.

It is also important to note that Chinese passives in the predicate position typically interact with aspect. Passive constructions with bare verbs in this position are uncommon, though they are frequent in other sentential positions. The contexts where bare passives occur as predicates are also the same as those which encourage omission of aspect markers in Chinese discourse in general. In English, the interaction between passives and aspect is not so apparent as in Chinese because all English sentences and clauses are formally marked by combined tense-aspect markers.

4.5 Genre distinctions

There are clearly genre variations in the distribution of passive variants in both English and Chinese. In English *get* passives are most commonly found in informal written genres and colloquial genres while in Chinese syntactic passives with markers other than *bei* show great variation across genres, with *wei…suo* typically occurring in formal written genres and *jiao, rang* and *gei* in colloquial genres. This section only compares the unmarked *be* passive in English and the universal *bei* passive in Chinese.

Passives in English occur more frequently in informative than imaginative genres. Official documents and academic prose, in particular, show very high proportions of passives. In contrast, these two genres have the lowest proportions of passives in Chinese, where mystery/detective stories (L) and religious writing (D) show exceptionally high proportions of passives. The difference in the overall distribution of passives is closely associated with the different functions of passive constructions in the two languages. As noted earlier, the passive is primarily used to mark an impersonal, objective and formal style in English whereas it is typically an "inflictive voice" in Chinese (Lian 1993: 92). Mystery and detective stories are often concerned with victims who suffer from various kinds of mishaps and the attentions of criminals. In religion human beings are passive animals whose fate is controlled by some kind of supernatural force. It is thus hardly surprising to find passive constructions most frequently in the two genres. In English, however, these genres are not obtrusive because of the overall high frequencies of passives in informative genres and low frequencies in imaginative genres.

Of the 16 genres under consideration, short passives are predominant in all genres in English but there are considerable variations in Chinese, where long passives appear to be used in speech and colloquial genres and short passives are typical of written genres. In terms of semantic properties, English passives appear to show high proportions of negative cases in imaginative categories (including speech) and news reportage/reviews but low proportions in official documents, academic prose and religious writing. In Chinese, proportions of negative cases are high in all genres barring official documents and academic prose.

4.6 Typological difference

Klaiman's (1991: 23) proposes a three-way classification of voice types in his cross-linguistic study of grammatical voice: basic, derived, and pragmatic. Active/middle voice is the unmarked, basic type while passivization is the "non-basic", derived voice type. Pragmatic voice involves "assignment to some sentential arguments of some special pragmatic status or salience" (Klaiman 1991: 24). Our discussions in Sections 2 and 3 appear to suggest that the essential typological difference between passives in English and Chinese lies in the fact that the former is a derived voice which involves passivisation whereas the latter is pragmatic voice. Our finding is in line with Wu (2005: 134–136), who observes three characteristics of passive constructions in Chinese: entailing no morphosyntactic alternation, involving the assignment of pragmatic salience,

and (the universal *bei* passives) generally expressing a sense of adversity and highlighting the affectedness of the patient.

5. Conclusion

This article explored passive constructions in English and Chinese from a contrastive perspective on the basis of corpus data. It was found that while passive constructions in both languages express a basic passive meaning, they also show a range of differences in terms of overall frequencies, syntactic features and functions, semantic properties, and distributions across genres. These differences are closely associated with the origins and functions of passive constructions in English and Chinese. Methodologically, this study demonstrates that comparable monolingual corpora provide a useful tool for contrastive linguistics.

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