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The Origin of Adversative Passives

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1. Introduction

This paper addresses the question of why the various 'passive' constructions, (1A)-(1B), in Mandarin are predominantly 'adversative', as exemplified by (2). A related question is why the Agent markers (also referred to in the literature as prepositions or co-verbs (Chao 1968; Huang 1974)) often appear without the Agent that they are supposed to mark, as shown in (1A), which is unique and curious in view of the fact that other prepositions in this language require an NP to follow (Hagège 1975:178).

(1) Mod Mandarin passive constructions: (PM: passive marker)

A. Subj + PM+(Agent) + Verb (Verb):

a. *gěi* + (Agent)

b. *jiào* + (Agent)

c. *ràng*+ (Agent)

d. *ái* + (Agent)

e. *zāo* + (Agent)

f. *bèi* + (Agent)

e.g. Shū + bèi + (tā) + ná zǒu le.

book PM-BEI (3sg) take go ASP

'[Unfortunately] the book was taken away by him.'

B. Lexicalized or frozen expressions:

jiànbèi+Verb:

a. *bèidòng* BEI move 'passive' *bèigào* BEI tell 'the accused'

b. *jiànyí* see suspect 'be suspected' *jiànguài* see strange 'be blamed'

jiànxào see laugh 'to be laughed at'

(2) a. Wǒ kànjiàn tā. (Active)
1sg see 3sg 'I saw him.'

b. Tā bèi wǒ kànjiàn. (Passive)
3sg PM-BEI 1sg see '[Unfortunately] he was seen by me.'

A historical perspective is proposed here to provide answers to these questions. The modern 'adversative' passives, as suggested here, are of the evolutionary lineage of the type of sentences found in the early history of the language whose function it is to express that the grammatical Subj is involuntarily affected by an outside force encoded in the VP. The genesis is traced to the *gòu*

'encounter' and *jiàn* 'see' type of Active sentences in the oracle-bone inscriptions (OBC) in 14-11th c BC in which these verbs are followed by a grammatical Obj representing an uncontrollable phenomenon, e.g. raining, calamity, descending spirits in the ritual, or enemies. That is, the Actives in OBC that evolved into the modern adversative passives are those in which the **direction of transitivity** of the main verb is from Obj to Subj, similar to the English *He endured the treatment* in which the Obj *treatment* affects the Subj *he*, rather than the other way around. In other words the notion of in-bound transitivity (*I fear him*) as distinguished from out-bound transitivity (*I hit him*) is important here. The former is Active in form but Passive in meaning. The structural opacity between Active and Passive in the early stage can be made transparent if we distinguish the direction of transitivity: out-bound from or in-bound toward the grammatical Subj.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way. Since word order is a defining feature of Chinese passives, Section 1 provides background information on word order in Chinese inasmuch as it is relevant to passives. Section 2 is the proposed account of the rise of the 'adversative' passive markers and their subsequent development and interaction with another area of the grammar, that of the evolution of prepositions. Section 3 returns to focus on the incipient stage when passive markers were full verbs and the structure that contained them overlapped with the active.

The term 'adversative' is to be understood as 'affected' and 'beyond the control'¹ of the grammatical Subj, thus often is adverse. Historically, there are cases in which the grammatical Subj is benefited rather than disadvantaged; the source of force in these cases typically comes from higher up, e.g. heaven or a king in connection with his benevolent act toward his subjects. But the function of adversity has been generalized in the course of time. By 'passive' it is meant here the type of sentences in which it is grammatically coded by the markers shown in (1A) that the grammatical Subj is impacted by the denoted action and the Subj/Patient is involuntarily (thus often negatively) affected, as shown in (2) above.

2. General background: passive and word order in Chinese

Chinese has always been basically a SVO language (Hu and Zhang 1988:180; for a different view, see e.g. Li and Thompson 1974a; Hashimoto 1988), with a strong tendency to put Topic, Focus, Contrast, etc. in sentence initial position. When the Focus is a Patient, the sentence would look like a passive, as seen in (3a) and (4a). In this kind of passive the interpretation of the grammatical Subj as the Patient or Undergoer is due to common sense knowledge. The structure itself is not Passive exclusively, since Active also share this structure, as illustrated in (3b), and (4b).

- (3) a. Xìn xiě le.
letter write ASP 'The letter was already written.'
- b. Wǒ xiě le.
1sg write ASP 'I wrote already.'
- (4) a. Háizi wèi le.

- baby feed ASP 'The baby has been fed.'
 b. Háizi chī le.
 baby eat ASP 'The baby has eaten.'

Structures like these have been in the language ever since the earliest written documents available to us. Chinese grammarians refer to them as *yìniàn bèidòng*, lit. sense passives, as different from structural passives, which are what we are interested here.

Though Modern and Ancient Chinese share the same basic SVO word order, there is a great difference between the two. The latter tends to put oblique cases (Instrumental, etc.) after the main Verb, whereas in Mod Mandarin these have migrated to the pre-verbal position (Chen 1994), as exemplified in (5).

- (5) a. Classical Chinese: Verb PP
 Yìn mǎ yú hé.
 drink horse PP-at river 'Let horses drink from the river.'
 b. Mod Mandarin:
 Ràng mǎ zài hé-li hē shuǐ.
 let horse PP-at river-in drink water 'Let horses drink from the river.'

The historical fronting of prepositions (as case markers), as we shall see later, is consequential to the re-analysis of the passive markers (which have always been before the main verb of action, any way (see Section 4)) as Agent markers.

3. Predecessors of present affected/adversative passives

Chinese grammarians generally have associated the modern passives with the following three structures in Classical Chinese (*wén yán*) (e.g. Wang 1957:15), translatable by modern passives: (a) a construction in which a non-topic agent is sometimes introduced by a preposition, most often a generalized preposition *yú* 'at', (b) the *wéi* Agent *suǒ* Verb construction, in which the non-topic agent is sometimes introduced pre-verbally by the preposition *wéi*, and (c) *jiàn* 'see'/'bèi' 'cover' + V (to express a meaning similar to the English *got VERBed*.) While this historical observation is correct, it does not answer the questions raised in the beginning of this paper. The present approach takes us further back in history before the formation of (b). That is, back to the time (i.e. OBC) when the ancestors of the modern Agent markers were main verbs

4. Historical development

In OBC the event encoded by the verb *gòu* 'encounter', or *jiàn* 'see', as distinguished from *look*, has in-bound transitivity, as proposed here, in that a sight/phenomenon appears before the subject and the subject is involuntarily affected.² The verb *gòu* 'encounter' typically collocates either with the descending spirits of ancestors in temple rituals (Yu 1979:179; Zhang Y 1988: 28-

45), as in (6), or undesirable natural phenomena from heaven such as raining, as in (7), and still later, encountering an enemy tribe; and the verb *jiàn* 'see' has similar collocations, as shown in (8)-(9). Both are most especially seen in the context of asking gods whether the king will incur/encounter blame from the irresistible power (ancestors or gods) from heaven. Later *jiàn* increased its productivity as a grammatical marker by being able to cooccur with more and more activities not necessarily associated with the power of nature, as exemplified in (12)-(13); so did *gòu*, as shown in (10)-(11), though the collocations of the two verbs did not exactly coincide. ({...}: indicates OBC source with collector and individual bone ID number)

- (6) 德 卣 千 三 {Tunna 488}
 gòu Shàng Jiǎ³ yú shan#⁴
 encounter SJ PP-at shan-ritual 'meet with ancestor SJ in the ritual shan#'
- (7) 大 不 美 雨 {Qian 3.16.1}
 Wáng bù gòu yǔ
 king not encounter rain '[The king] perhaps will not encounter rain?'
- (8) 余 見 害 {Qian 7.33.1}
 Yú jiàn zāi.
 I see harm. 'I will be harmed.'
- (9) 夙 日 王 出 見 雨 則 雨 {Xu 6.10.4}
 Jīnrì wáng qī bù, jiàn yǔ.
 today king PART walk see rain 'Today the king went out, he got rained on.'
- (10) 魯 伯 有 嘏 王 之 休。 (bronze inscription, Zhou dynasty(12-7th c BC))
 Earl of Lu go encounter King's grace
 'The Earl of Lu was blessed by the King's graciousness.'⁵
- (11) 嘏 多 受 侮 不 少 (before 6th c BC)
 encounter suffering quite many, receive insult not few
 'was saddened [by] many [sufferings] and humiliated [by many insults].'
- (12) 公 太 史 見 於 宗 周 年。 (bronze inscription, early Zhou)
 Gong Taishi see official-duty PP-at temple Zhou year
 'in the year when the Grand Recorder was charged with the official duty [by the King] in Zong Zhou'
- (13) 必 見 於 世 必 見 於 人。 (3rd c BC)
 definitely see condemn PP-in world; . . . must see ridicule PP-in people
 'would surely be condemned by the world [and] ridiculed by the people.'

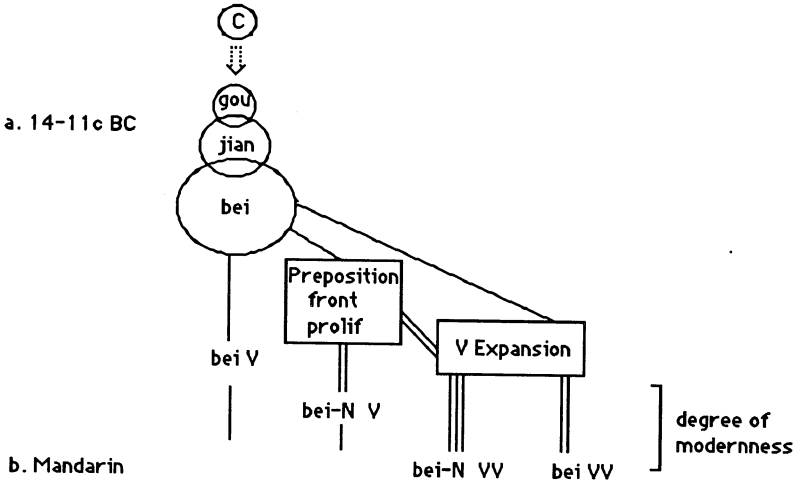
Still later, *bèi*, as shown in (14) (notice both the functional and structural parallelism between *jiàn* and *bèi*), and other morphemes rose to take over the

function represented by the earlier *gòu* and *jiàn*, retaining the essential meaning of suffering from, or being affected by, an irresistible outside action.

- (14) *xīn ér jiàn yí, zhōng ér bèi bàng* (1st c BC)
 truthful but see doubt, loyal but BEI-cover slander
 'Those who are truthful are being suspected and those who are loyal are slandered [lit. to be covered by slanders].'

An independently motivated historical change of Preposition Fronting and Proliferation (notice the post-verbal prepositions in Classical Chinese as double underlined in (13)) and later another independently justified historical Verbal Expansion (V--->VV) (see Chen 1993a and 1993b) account for the coalescence of the passive markers with the newly preposed prepositions (taking Agent as object, thus assuming the modern Agentive marking function), and the varied passive constructions shown in (1A)-(1B). These two major historical structural developments interact with the functional affected passives as expressed by *jiàn/gòu* in a way perhaps analogous to the relationship between cookie cutters and dough: the affected function being the dough and the content, and the cookie cutters being the grammatical coding or chunking that are responsible for the different shapes and forms that the passives appear at different stages. Each of the historical changes mentioned above did not totally replace the previous forms: remnants of early forms of differing productive strength persist in modern Mandarin. A schematic overview of this is illustrated in (15).

- (15) Lexicalization and grammatical codification of the concept of the Subj being (adversely) affected:



The modern passive markers *ràng*, *jiào*, *gěi*, *zāo*, and *ái* still retain their strong adversative meaning, but *bèi* is on its way to becoming a pure passive

marker, losing ever increasingly its original adversative function, especially under the influence and association with English passives (Wang H. 1959:43; Hsueh 1989:119) as evidenced in newspaper writings and translations, in fact so much so that it is regarded as an Agent marker in passives, much like the English *by*.

The proposed approach accounts for the pervasive adversative meaning in the various marks of the modern passives, their differences from other prepositions, the chronological order (albeit with much overlappings) of changes, and the modern reflexes reflecting degrees of modernness.

5. The rise of passives: structural opacity between active and passive

The beginning of Chinese affected passives occurred, as is suggested here, at the time when they were indistinguishable from actives in form. Certain verbs, like *gòu* 'encounter' and *jiàn* 'see', come to be typically used in contexts of adversity or fear and they become contaminated by that sense, so that when used outside the contexts of natural phenomena, spirit rituals, etc, which engendered the sense of 'advers effect' they continue to denote that content. Both the verbs *gòu* 'encounter' and *jiàn* 'see' appear in the syntactic environment shown in (16), which is the same as a prototypical transitive active, (17).

- (16) SUBJ-person + *gòu* 'encounter' +N/V
 jiàn 'see'
- (17) SUBJ-person + *lǐng* 'order' +N
 hùo 'hunt'

The structural opacity between (16) and (17) is further strengthened by the fact that the V in (16) can be used as N (Guan 1953; Chen W. 1980:195; Chen M 1953). For example the word *yǔ* 'rain, raining' is N/V in (18a) (=9), whereas in (18b) it is the main Verb. It is interesting to note that oracle-bone grammarian Zhao (1986:21) consistently uses modern passives to gloss this type of *jiàn* sentences, as shown in (18a').

- (18) a. *Jīnrì wáng qǐ bù, jiàn yǔ.*
 today day king PART go-outing, see rain
 'Today the King went outing, was rained.'
- b. *Jīn xī bù yǔ.*
 today night not rain
 'Tonight [perhaps it will] not rain?'
- a'. Mandarin: *Jīnrì Shāng wáng chū xíng, bèi yǔ lín.*
 today Shang king go out, BEI rain pour
 'The Shang king went outing today; [he] was rained.'

The word *zāi* 'calamity, harm' is another N/V example (Zhu 1990) that appears in both a prototypical transitive active as the main verb, (19b), and incipient passive, (19a), which Zhao glossed with the modern passive marker *bèi*, (19a').

- (19) a. 余 見 災
 Yú jiàn zāi.
 I see harm. 'I will be harmed.'
 {Qian 7.33.1}
- b. 王 其 災 乎
 zhēn: Zǔ Xīn zāi wǒ?
 divine: Zu Xin harm I '[The King] divined: will ancestor ZX harm me?'
 {Qian 1.11.5}
- a' Mandarin: Wǒ bèi zāihài.
 1sg BEI harm 'I'll be harmed.'

When *jiàn* or *gòu* is followed by an action, the grammatical Subj is involuntarily affected (i.e. understood as Patient). Take for instance the action of raining or being windy. If it is desired for agricultural reasons, the sentence would be 'will God orders rain?' That is, a voluntary Subj/Agent (god) is followed by an out-bound transitive verb *lìng* 'order, bestow' or *jiàng* 'make fall'), as shown in (20). Or, if it is a plain question asking whether it will rain (as in our modern weather forecast), the sentence will either have gods as Subj/Agent, (20), or Time/Place word, (21)-(22), much like the modern Chinese, (23).

- (20) a. 帝 不 命 雨
 Dì bù lìng yǔ
 god not command rain 'God [will] not command rain/ (it to) rain?'
- b. 帝 命 風
 Dì lìng fēng
 god command wind 'God [will] command wind/it to be windy?'
- (21) 王 其 雨 乎, 王 其 風 乎
 rènxù qí yǔ, rènxù fēng. {Hou Shang 32.1}
 renxu [day 59] PART rain, renxu [day 59] wind
 'Renxu [day 59] [it will] rain? renxu [day 59] windy?'
- (22) 夙 不 雨
 Jīn xī bù yǔ.
 today night not rain 'Tonight perhaps it will not rain?'
- (23) 夙 不 雨
 Mod Mandarin: Jīntiān wǎnshang xià yǔ ma?
 today evening fall rain Q 'Will it rain tonight?'

However, if raining is not desired (as when divining for a fine day for outing or hunting), the involuntarily affected Patient (King) will be cast in the Subj position followed by the in-bound transitive verb *jiàn* 'see' or *gòu* 'encounter' as seen in (7) and (9) earlier. When the Agent/Causer (god) is the grammatical Subj, *jiàn* or *gòu* is never used for the same information. Also, when divining for a sunny day (*yáng* 'sunny', *qǐ* 'become sunny') or when other positive connotation words were used (*yòu* 'blessing', *ruò* 'god's approval'), the grammatical Subj (King) is not followed by *jiàn/gòu*, instead it is followed by verbs like *shòu* 'receive' (*Wáng shòu yòu* 'The King will be blessed' {Heji 30925}).

It was the verb *jiàn* 'see'/*gòu* 'encounter' followed by action that become specialized and grammaticalized, acquiring the grammatical status of adversative/affected passive markers. The reason is that the following action nominal is a phenomenal occurrence (descending spirits, disaster, rain, etc.) which renders the preceding *jiàn* 'see'/*gòu* 'encounter' pale by comparison, losing its lexical content and information value. A construction with verbs in sequence is a potential breeding ground for grammaticalization. The evolution of grammatical markers from full verbs is a recurrent theme throughout the history of the language.

The incipient Passive markers in *jiàn/gòu +V*, unlike their descendants, were not Agent markers yet; the agent was introduced later by the general, common preposition *yú*, as shown in (13) above, repeated here.

- (13) *gù jiàn fù yú shì*; . . . *bì jiàn zǐ yú mǐn*.
 definitely see condemn PP-at world; . . . must see ridicule PP-at people
 '[would] definitely be condemned by the world and ridiculed by people.'

While *gòu* 'encounter' became non-productive and retired from the language shortly after the period of the Book of Odes (ca. 7th c BC),⁶ *jiàn*, ever increasing in its productivity, continued to flourish into the Classical period until later *bèi* 'to cover; to be covered' (originally a noun meaning 'coverlet') rose to join it ca. 1st c BC, appearing only sporadically. *The Records of the Historian* (1st c BC) provides us with a view of overlapping in progress: (24), without an agent, being the oldest; (25), with an agent introduced by preposition *yú*, hallmark of the high Classical Chinese; and (26), the new passive marker *bèi* working parallel to/overlapping with the older *jiàn*. Mod Mandarin, as a full-fledged final stage of Passive, complete with Passive marker as Agent marker, is provided here, (25b), for comparison.

(24) *jiàn shā*

(1st c BC)

- see kill [He] was killed.'
- (25) a. jiàn duǎn yú dà chén. (1st c BC)
see short PP-at great official [He] was slighted by high officials.'
- Cf. Mod Mandarin:
- b. bèi dà chén qiáobuǐ [He] was slighted by high officials.'
BEI great official belittle
- (26) xīn ér jiàn yí, zhōng ér bèi bàng (1st c BC)
truthful but see doubt, loyal but BEI slander
'The truthful are suspected and the loyal are slandered.'

Around the 5th century, bèi+Agent NP already appeared (Mei 1990:199) though not wide spread. By the 8th century when vernacular literature (e.g. *biànwén* and *huàběn*) began to flourish, bèi was so generalized (grammaticalized) and entrenched in the language that it threatened to replace the passive marker jiàn in the then vernacular Chinese. While jiàn 'see' had never fully developed into a grammaticalized Agent marker (preposition) before it died out, the grammaticalization of bèi continued and steadily increased into modern times. Along the way it collided into the path of the historical development of prepositions (from few to many and from predominantly post-verbal to pre-verbal), which had a very weak beginning in OBC, much earlier than the grammaticalization of bèi, and became intertwined with the latter (i.e. the development of prepositions), thus the infamy 'co-verb or preposition?' (Chang 1977, Li and Thompson 1974b).

Like jiàn, bèi became a passive marker; moreover it went a step further -- becoming a pure Agent marker. The two functions co-exist in Mod Mandarin, as shown earlier in (1f).

(27) Stages of grammaticalization for bèi :

- i as a transitive verb taking (a) concrete and (b) action nominals as Obj
- ii grammaticalized as a Passive marker yielding to the following action verb for lexical content
- iii expanded to incorporate Agent NP by means of the then general preposition yú or wéi
- iv further grammaticalized as a pure Agent marker while retaining the usage of Passive marker

Data in (28) provide supporting evidence for the above.

- (28) a. ér mǐn bù bèi qí zé (ca. 4th c BC)
but people not wear/cover his benevolence
'but people are not blessed with [the king's] benevolence '

Secretariat; Blood/tears were shed; Stones were passed; The meal was prepared by the chef; These cars were manufactured by the Ford Motor Co; Words were said by both parties; Rice is grown in China; etc.

The historical explanation accounts for not only the subsequent development (grammaticalization) and the alliance made (with prepositions for the functional purpose of case marking), but also the persistent tenor, ever since the nascent phase, of the attitudinal viewpoint conveyed by the speaker. The latter was historically inherent in the lexical source of the markers (verbs expressing the subject-experiencer being involuntarily impacted visually (*see*) and experientially (*encounter*)). It is not surprising that there have never been regular Active-Passive alternations. The longevity of the expression is attributable to the nature of function and form -- function clings to form, and vice versa, each feeding on the other. Thus in the end, both have generalized a great deal concerning what constitutes irresistible outside forces.

NOTES

- 1 Klaiman (1991).
- 2 The involuntarity of the verbs *see* and *encounter* in Chinese can be seen in the fact that in Mandarin *kànjiàn* 'see' and *yùjiàn* 'encounter' cannot collocate with *gùyì* 'purposely' (**Wǒ gùyì kànjiàn/yùjiàn tā*. 'I purposely saw/encountered him'), while *kàn* 'look' can (*Wǒ gùyì kàn tā*. 'I purposely looked at him').
- 3 Shang kings' names, typically disyllabic, were often written as one combinatory graph in the oracle bones. The oracle-bone inscriptions are reproduced here in consultation with Li X. (1965), Gao (1980) and Zhang B. (1988).
- 4 # indicates a graph without a modern correspondence. Its phonetic spelling provided here only indicates a possible pronunciation.
- 5 Dobson's (1962:206) translation 'the Earl of Lu happened upon the King's graciousness' is more literal, which also reflects the ancients' view that activities of Heaven or the graciousness of the King (as Son of Heaven *tiānzǐ*) is beyond one's will: one (the Subj) does not deserve to *get* it; one can only chance upon it.
- 6 In late Zhou the character *gòu* is written alternately with the original walking radical 𠂔 → 𠂕 → 𠂖 and the eye radical 𠂗 → 𠂘, like the character *jiàn* (see (9)), which is corroborating evidence that the two (*gòu* and *jiàn*) were perceived by scribes to share the same abstract meaning.
- 7 For the relation between middle voice and passive see Kemmer 1993.

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