

THE EMERGENCE OF PASSIVE STRUCTURE WITH OBLIGATORY AGENT PHRASE IN CHINESE

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In the past 3,000 years or so, the structures and functions of the Chinese passives have undergone three typologically striking changes: (a) the passive morphemes in Archaic Chinese could not introduce any agent phrase in the preverbal position, but those in Contemporary Chinese must do so to make the passive structure well-formed, (b) the agent phrase could only occur in the POSTVERBAL position in Archaic Chinese but rigorously constrained to the PREVERBAL position in Contemporary Chinese, and (c) the passive morphemes are extremely diverse in Today's Chinese, four in Mandarin Chinese and sixty-nine in its dialects which have grammaticalized from different lexical sources, but their structures and functions are quite consistent and uniform. This article addresses the motivations and mechanisms behind these changes. I will prove that the passives and other major active structures actually share the same syntactic schema, and the overall evolution of the morph-syntax in history are responsible for the changes of the passive. The overall properties of the grammatical systems in particular periods to great extent determine the functions, structures, life-spans, grammaticalization paths of the passives. The studies in passive structures have played a crucial role in developing linguistic theories since Chomsky (1957), and the present analysis may therefore provide new perspectives for evaluating and improving those theories. Through offering an accurate yet comprehensive description about the issue, this article could also be seen as a critique to Li (2018, *Language* 94.2: e74-e98).

The complete passive pattern in Archaic Chinese, namely the 'passive morpheme + PP agent' construction, may be illustrated in the following example.

(1) *Wú cháng jiàn xiào yú dàfāng zhī jiā.*

I often JIAN laugh-at YU knowledgeable NOML one

'I was often laughed at by those knowledgeable people.' (Zhuang zi, Third century BC)

In this period, no passive morphemes could introduce an agent phrase in the preverbal position. However, the passive morphemes in Contemporary Mandarin Chinese and many dialects must introduce an agent phrase in the preverbal position in order to make the structure well-formed, something like the dummy subject *it* or *there* in English, as illustrated in 2.

(2) a. *Tā kěnéng jiào shénme-shì tuō-zhù le.*

he probably PASS something drag PFV

'He is probably dragged by something.' (The crosstalks of Present-day Chinese)

b. **Tā kěnéng jiào tuō-zhù le.*

he probably PASS drag PFV

The 'meaningless' agents need not to be spelled out in the corresponding English instances, but once they were taken away, the passive instances become ungrammatical as in 2b and 2b.

Specifically, we argue that the direct impetus for the emergence of the passive pattern with obligatory might be the emergence of the disposal construction, a new grammatical means which was first introduced into the language in the seventh century. Those disposal morphemes must introduce a patient phrase in the preverbal position in order to make the disposal structure well-formed. The passive and the disposal are functionally related: the former introduces an agent in the preverbal position and the latter introduces an patient in the same position. Thus, the passive constructionalization is subject to the analogization of the newly established disposal construction in Modern Chinese (from the 16th century to now).