

Impact of Translation on Language Modernization:

Expansion of the Use of 被 *Bei* Construction in Chinese

Set within the framework of language modernization, the New Culture Movement during 1910s is generally viewed as the starting point of Chinese modernization. Faced with the unprecedented social problems, Chinese scholars at that time were keen to identify the evils responsible for the deplorable state of China, and the ‘imprecise Chinese grammar’ was among their targets. So the initial phase of Chinese modernization was carried out by private individuals like authors, journalists, who were typically also translators, and then, the written form invented by them became public and contributed to making canons through print culture and education—A private to public form is followed. The expansion of the use of 被 *bei* construction is an example.

It has long been noticed that many English passive sentences cannot be translated into Chinese marked passive constructions with 被 *bei*, a notional passive construction without any overt markers is needed instead. As a result of Chinese modernization, some constraints originally involved with the use of 被 *bei* construction, such as the inflective sense, have been observed to be loosened. However, it remains undiscussed that ① whether the overall frequency of the 被 *bei* construction in language use has significantly increased, in contrast against the notional passive construction, and ② whether the animacy constraint (i.e. the subjects of the 被 *bei* constructions tend to be animate) and the verbal semantic constraint (i.e. change-of-state verbs tend to occur in the notional passive construction) have also been loosened. The present study adopts a picture description experiment to address these two questions.

Participants of different age groups and education levels were asked to produce sentences, initiated with the themes, to describe pictures. Results show that younger participants and more educated participants significantly produce more 被 *bei* constructions, in contrast against the notional passive constructions, than older participants and less educated participants. However, in general they are equally sensitive to the animacy cue and verbal semantic (change-of-state/non change-of-state) cue. The present results confirm that Chinese modernization is a dynamic movement originated from highly educated people, echoing with the impact of translation on Chinese modernization.

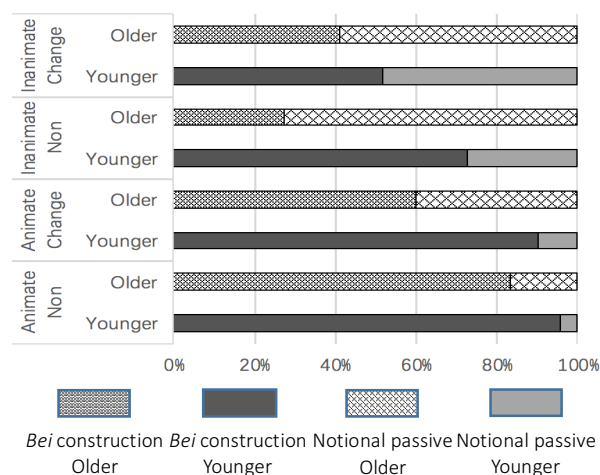


Figure 1. Percentages of 被 *Bei* Construction Use against the Notional Passive Construction Use (by Age)

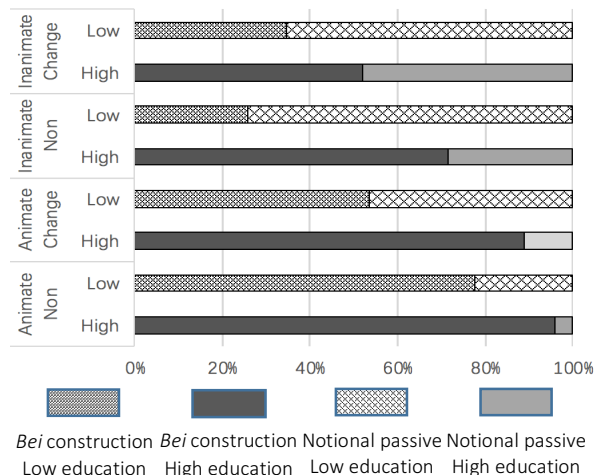


Figure 2. Percentages of 被 *Bei* Construction Use against the Notional Passive Construction Use (by Education)

50-Word Summary

With a picture description experiment, the present study found that more educated younger generation significantly use more 被 *bei* constructions than less educated older generation, echoing with the fact that Chinese modernization was initiated by private individuals, especially translators, and the written form invented by them gradually became canons through education.

Maximum of 5 Keywords

language modernization; Chinese; passive; sociolinguistics; translation

Presenter Bio Blurb (max. 100 words)

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