

# "Passive" Morphology in Mandarin

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The passive in Mandarin has been a controversial problem for many years. Most linguists who believe that Mandarin has a passive construction identify it with the *bei* 被 construction. This usually takes the form NP *bei* (NP) V-(ASP)/(MP)/(RP) where *bei* is the putative passive marker, ASP is an aspectual particle, MP a verbal measure phrase, and RP a resultative phrase, as in:

*Wo bei ta da-le yi-dun*  
I PASS he beat-ASP MP (one time)

I was beaten by him. (ta is a general third-person pronoun, here translated as 'he/him'.)

The main difficulty with calling this a passive sentence is that there is no passive morphology marking the verb. (The aspectual marker *le* 了 applies just as easily to non-*bei* sentences as it does to the *bei*- construction). This is a serious problem for most theories of passive. It is possible, however, to omit the NP *ta* in the example above, in which case the *bei* is immediately in front of the verb "beat." This possibility has led some to suggest that in sentences without an NP between *bei* and the verb, *bei* itself can be treated as a morphological marker.

This would mean that there are actually two distinct morphemes *bei*: one which always appears before NP VP (*bei*<sub>1</sub>), and one which always appears before a VP (*bei*<sub>2</sub>).<sup>1</sup> We will argue for two points in this paper: 1) the "verbal-marker" *bei*<sup>2</sup> which appears directly in front of the verb is not a morphological marker attached to the verb. 2) There is a third type of *bei* which does have a special morphological status.

There are at least two reasons to believe that *bei*<sub>2</sub> is not attached to the verb it precedes. First, a manner adverbial may appear between *bei* and the verb:

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<sup>1</sup>The presence or absence of the NP in such sentences does not seem to affect the requirement that the verb be followed by (ASP)/(MP)/(RP).

<i>ta</i>	<i>bei</i>	<i>hen-hen-de</i>	<i>da-le</i>	<i>yi-dun</i>
he	PASS	viciously	beat-ASP	MP

This is not otherwise possible in morphologically complex words. Second, both *bei* and the verb it precedes retain their regular tonal values, rather than changing to neutral tone, as often happens in morphologically complex words.

The form *bei* does pass the simplest test for a bound morpheme, which is that it cannot appear as a single independent element (it is not grammatical to say simply "*bei*"). This would ordinarily allow us to claim that every time it combines with a verb it creates a morphologically complex word. This is not a good analysis, however, given *bei*'s otherwise wide syntactic freedom. In this sense, it is like the aspectual particle *-le* which is a bound morpheme by the same criterion that *bei* is, but can appear at the end of almost any sentence.

While we argue against the general use of *bei* as a bound morpheme indicating passive, we cannot claim that it is never used in morphologically complex words. We will consider two cases: *bei* used in nominal constructions and *bei* used in verbal constructions. Following is a representative list of *bei* used in nominal constructions, culled from several dictionaries:

被加數	<i>beijiashu</i>	"summand"
被除數	<i>beichushu</i>	"dividend"
被減數	<i>beijianshu</i>	"minuend"
被乘數	<i>beichengshu</i>	"multiplicand"
被告	<i>beigao</i>	"the accused"
被統治者	<i>beitongzhizhe</i>	"the ruled"
被侵略者	<i>beiqinluezhe</i>	"the invaded"
被上訴人	<i>beishangsuren</i>	"appellee"
被選舉權	<i>beixuanjuquan</i>	"the right to be elected"

All of these words can probably be classified morphologically as complex nouns. This does not demand that we treat *bei* here differently than we do in regular verb phrases. In particular, *beigao*, *beitongzhizhe*, and *beiqinluezhe* are simply nominalized verb phrases. They are nominalized explicitly in the last two cases by the nominalizer *zhe*, and implicitly in the case of *beigao*. The mathematical terms are less clear for some speakers, but it seems that these are also subject to the same analysis; the antonyms of these words are produced by simply removing the

*bei-*. The final bound morpheme *-shu* is itself nominal, and therefore read in the fourth tone. The last two examples are more interesting; for three of the four speakers we consulted, "*bei shangsu*" is not a grammatical phrase. "*bei xuanju*," on the other hand, produced an even split, with two saying it was grammatical and two disagreeing. This suggests that *bei* in these cases may function as a morphological formative rather than as it does in sentences.

The verbal forms involving *bei* are quite interesting. We suggest that each of the following examples is a word, rather than a verb phrase, and that in each of these *bei* is a morphological formative.

被捕	<i>beibu</i>	"to be arrested"
被俘	<i>beifu</i>	"to be captured"
被竊	<i>beiqie</i>	"to be stolen"
被迫	<i>beipo</i>	"to be forced to"
被害	<i>beihai</i>	"to be killed" (distinct from "to be harmed"?)
被動	<i>beidong</i>	"to be passive"

Our main justification for claiming that these are words, rather than verb phrases, is that for the first four, the morpheme following *bei-* is bound. In other words, *bu* "to capture" *fu*, "to make x a prisoner of war" *qie* "to steal", and *po* "to force, compel" are not independent verbs. They appear in other compounds, but never by themselves. When we have strings in which one member is bound, it is generally recognized that we are forced to recognize it as a lexical rather than syntactic unit.

This is therefore a very interesting situation. We cannot treat these as ordinary verb phrases in which a verb is preceded by *bei*, because the verb cannot appear by itself. This is our first point. Second, in these cases we cannot insert either an agential or adverbial phrase in these words. The fact that we cannot use an agent with these "passives" is very unusual. In a number of Chinese dialects, such as the Yue and Min dialects, agents are required (or highly preferred) in passive. This is also true in Northern Mandarin dialects which use *rang* 讓 as a passive marker. A reasonable explanation for the fact that an agential phrase is not allowed here is that this is not a syntactic construction, but a lexical construction; these do not usually allow the syntactic insertion of other forms. Although it may seem unusual to have syntactic structures such as passive appearing as part of a lexical construction, there are a few parallel examples in English,

as in sentences like "He is rumored to have fled the country." This seems to be passive, yet the word "rumor" otherwise only appears as a noun.

The last two examples given above are slightly different. *Hai* "to harm, injure" and *dong* "to move" are both free morphemes. In the case of *beidong*, however, this is a stative verb for many speakers, since it can be preceded by the degree adverb *hen* 很 "very." This is the primary criterion for stative verbs. The meaning is therefore quite distinct from a syntactic phrase involving *bei* and *dong* as independent elements. When they are independent elements in a sentence, *bei* is never preceded by *hen*. For *beihai* on the other hand, there is an interesting ambiguity here. *beihai* with the agent phrase is usually interpreted not as "to be harmed or injured" but as "to be killed or murdered." When an agent is added, however, the meaning of "harmed or injured" is much more salient, though one of our informants was still able to accept the agential form with the meaning "murder." It may therefore be possible to treat *beihai* as an idiomatic form for "to murder."

In addition to these forms, there are two others which are worth noting:

被難	<i>beinan</i>	"to suffer from hardships"
被酒	<i>beijiu</i>	"to suffer from intoxication"

Here *bei* has the sense of "to suffer." This is one meaning which it had in Classical Chinese, where it was a full verb. We therefore interpret these words as VO compounds. As we might expect, these words have a somewhat literary flavor to them, but they still regularly appear in newspapers and semi-formal speech.

A secondary point we will also consider here is what part of speech these *bei-* forms belong to. Unlike English, where "passive" morphology is often used in adjectival forms such as "to be tired" and so forth, these *bei-* forms are not stative, with the exception of the compound *beidong*. Again, this is because they cannot be preceded by the degree adverb *hen*. They can, however, be preceded by the negative *mei-you* 沒有.<sup>2</sup> This makes them verbs in at least some circumstances. On the other hand, none of them can be followed by objects. An appropriate label might therefore be non-stative intransitive verbs. It is interesting to compare them in this respect with the English "adjectival passives" such as "tired." Unlike the Chinese *bei-* forms,

<sup>2</sup>It is unusual, according to our informants, for them to be preceded by the negative *bu*. In this sense they are similar to resultative verbs such as *kanjian* "to see" which are not usually preceded by *bu*, but only by *meiyou*.

"tired" can be used in the comparative construction, and with degree adverbs such as "very." Like English adjectives, some of the *bei-* forms can directly modify nouns; for example *beiqie wupin* "stolen goods" or *beifu shibing* "captured soldiers." Unlike English, however, we do not think that this sort of direct modification is an accurate test for adjectival status in Mandarin. Many Chinese "adjectives" (which we prefer to call stative verbs) cannot directly modify nouns; instead, the structural particle *de* must be added between stative verb and noun. Moreover, many nouns cannot be modified by the *bei-* forms in this way; for instance *\*beiqie yizi* "stolen chairs" is apparently not acceptable. Perhaps there are semantic reasons for this. Another point to consider is that the words *wupin* "goods" and *shibing* "soldiers" in the examples above are both literary words. Their behavior is worth further study.<sup>3</sup>

One point remains to be made. We noted above that some scholars have suggested there are actually two forms of *bei*, which are to be distinguished syntactically. The first, *bei*<sub>1</sub>, is always followed by NP VP, while the second, *bei*<sub>2</sub>, is always followed by VP. How does the "morphological" *bei-* we have been examining fit in here? We tentatively suggest that it is a third form, distinct from *bei*<sub>1</sub> and *bei*<sub>2</sub>. Our reasons are as follows.

First, *bei*<sub>1</sub> is generally considered a co-verb or preposition. One of the most notable characteristics of Mandarin co-verbs is that they are always followed by NP objects. The forms we have examined have no NP objects at all. In addition, the use of co-verbs in word-formation is unusual in Mandarin. We have found no examples for the most common co-verbs, such as *ba* 把, *gei* 給, *cong* 從 and so forth ever appearing in compound words at all. We must, however, distinguish these co-verbs from the homophonous full verbs. For instance *ba* in the compounds *bachi* 把持 and *bawo* 把握 can be treated as a full verb. This is analogous to the use of *bei-* in the VO form *beinan*.

In order to decide whether morphological *bei-* is related to *bei*<sub>2</sub>, we should first decide what *bei*<sub>2</sub> is. This is not an easy question. We will attempt to circumvent this issue by appeal to analogy. Naturally, our conclusion is only tentative. There is another passive marker which is quite similar to *bei-* in showing a syntactic dichotomy. That is *gei* 給, as in the following two examples:

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<sup>3</sup>I owe these second thoughts on *bei-* forms and adjectival passives to Professor Lisa Cheng's remarks during the discussion of this paper at the ICCL/NACCL Joint Meeting.

*Wo-de shu gei ta nong-huai-le*  
My book was ruined by him.

*rou gei chi-diao-le*  
The meat was completely devoured.

Despite this parallel to *bei-*, however, like co-verbs, this "passive" *gei-* never plays a role in word-formation. This suggests it is also unlikely that we see *bei*<sub>2</sub> appearing in the *bei-* forms above. Another morpheme syntactically similar to *bei* is *zai* 在, used to indicate progressive or imperfective when followed by a verb. Like *bei*<sub>2</sub>, it is a bound morpheme always followed by a VP. Like *gei*, it too never plays a role in word-formation. Argument by analogy in these cases is not always convincing, but added to the other points discussed above, the independent nature of "morphological" *bei* seems a reasonable conclusion.