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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Use and Translation of Chinese Passive Voice into English: A Case Study based on 'To live' by Yu Hua (1993) and its English translation

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| ABSTRACT
This research aims to comparatively analyze how Mandarin Chinese passive constructions are translated into English based on a pair of books, which are Yu Hua's *To live* and its corresponding English translation by Michael Berry. A mixed qualitative and quantitative method is used in the current research. Results show that the Mandarin passive voice can be translated both into the English passive voice and the English active voice according to the varied meanings of contexts (positive, negative, and neutral), while the former is the overwhelming majority. The most frequently used Mandarin *BÈI*-construction can be generally regarded as an equivalence of the English BE-construction. It has also been found that the frequency of using passives to express negative issues is very high in Mandarin, and the use of the type of Mandarin passives relates to the meaning of contexts.

| KEYWORDS
Mandarin passive voice, English passive voice, structures of passives, English translation

| ARTICLE INFORMATION
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1. Introduction

According to Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016, p. 3), almost all grammar constructions, including the passives, can be analyzed from three different perspectives: form, meaning, and use. 'Form' focuses on the structure of general and specific grammar patterns, both morphological and syntactically. 'Meaning' investigates what kind of semantic value a particular grammatical construction can offer up when it is used. Finally, 'use' emphasizes the importance of pragmatics, which requires people to know when and why the specific grammatical construction is supposed to be used instead of using its approximations. The current research will adopt Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia's three-dimensional framework to analyze the passive constructions in Mandarin Chinese (hereafter Mandarin) and English.

Voice is one of the most critical and essential grammatical categories that exist in most languages as it indicates the relationship between the verb and the subject as it communicates "whether the subject is the actor or is acted upon" (Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2016, p. 351) by the verb and becomes the patient. There are three main voices - the active voice, the passive voice, and the middle voice. The active voice, the most common expression in languages, is where the subject performs the action denoted by the verb on the target of the action. In the passive voice, the grammatical subject is acted upon by the verb, being the focus of the sentence. The special middle voice is not as pervasive as the first two voices, while it shares something in common with them. It refers to the construction that "a nonagentive patient is put into the grammatical subject position in a sentence" (Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2016, p. 359) while the verb form is still in the active voice. The passive voice as the center of the current research will be elaborated upon in the following section.

Larson (1984) pointed out that "translation is basically a change of form", namely, from the original language to the target language "by way of semantic structure" while the meaning of the utterance must remain unchanged (p. 34). Therefore, only the form

changes during the process of translation. In this case, the comparisons of forms of passive constructions in Mandarin will be the center of this research.
As mentioned previously, the research aims to recognize, compare, and analyze the translation of Mandarin passive constructions into English. The research questions are put forward as follows:

(1) Are Mandarin passive constructions always translated to English passive constructions correspondingly? If not, what types of structure can be delivered?
(2) In what type of contexts (positive, negative, or neutral) are Mandarin passive constructions often used?
(3) Is the choice of Mandarin passive markers statistically related to the meaning of contexts?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The form of the English passive construction

The passive construction, as a ubiquitous verb conjugation existing in almost all world languages, has never been forgotten by researchers. In fact, they have proposed different definitions and classifications over decades. Quirk et al. (1972) divided the passive constructions into three subcategories: agentive passives, quasi-passives, and non-agentive passives, according to whether the passive sentences can be transformed into the active voice and the "verbal and/or adjectival properties" that the predicates have. Subsequently, they proposed another scale to classify passives into central passives, semi-passives, and pseudo-passives. The new classification does overlap with the previous, yet the standard of grouping is somewhat more detailed. In general, there is no significant difference between the two taxonomies. Based on Quirk et al.'s thoughts, Granger (1983) only focused on analyzing the most typical [BE + past participle of verb] construction (the structure will be further elaborated later) and subdivided passives into seven groups including passives, verbal pseudo-passives, adjectival pseudo-passives, peripheral combinations, and so on. Linguists such as Puckica (2009) and Toyota (2009) later came up with different taxonomies, and most classifications mentioned previously overlap more or less.

The forms of the English passives being analyzed in the current paper focus on the most prototypical construction, that is, [patient + BE/GET + past participle + (BY + agent)]. The prepositional BY-phrase is used to introduce the doer of the action, which is omissible in some cases where the agent is unknown, reluctant, general, or out of other reasons. In addition, the HAVE-construction will be involved roughly as well. For example,

(1a) The company demolished the company. (active)
(1b) The house <u>was/got demolished by</u> the company. (passive)[1]

Sentence (1b) is constructed with the auxiliary verb BE or Get, followed by the past participle of the main verb and the BY-phrase (Macias, 2010, p. 333). It is generally recognized as the representative expression of the English passive construction, supported by Jespersen (1933), Svartvik (1966), Langacker (1982), Quirk et al. (1972, 1985), and many others. HAVE can also function as a passive auxiliary besides BE and GET, and its structure is [agent + HAVE + patient + past participle]. Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016, p. 356) noted that the HAVE-construction could represent two different cases, either the passive or the causative. Take sentence (2) as an example:

(2) Tom had his arm broken.

There are two ways to interpret the sentence. When it is passive, the fact that Tom broke his arm is an accident that is beyond his control. If it is causative, Tom is the causer of breaking the arm.

Even though the auxiliary verb BE and GET can be regarded as alternatives sometimes, it does not mean that they can fully replace each other. As Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016) point out, the GET in the GET-construction "does not function as a true auxiliary verb like BE in the BE-construction in negatives and questions" (p. 354) because the do-support is essential, as in sentence (3).

(3a) — <u>Was</u> he <u>criticized</u> yesterday? — No, he wasn't.
(3b) —* Got he criticized yesterday? — *No, he got not.
(3c) — Did he <u>get criticized</u> yesterday? — No, he didn't get criticized.

In addition, compared to the BE-construction which is semantically neutral (Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia, 2016, p.357), the GET-construction is frequently used to convey adversity (Carter &McCarthy, 1999; Sawasaki, 2000; Thompson et al., 2013; Larsen-

[1] All the English samples are the researcher's own. All the Mandarin samples and corresponding translations are extracted from the novel *To Live*.

Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2016). Syntactically, the GET-constructions tend to lack expressed agent, namely, the lack of the BY-phrase (Collins, 1996; Carter &McCarthy, 1999; Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia, 2016).

2.2 The form of the Mandarin passive construction

Generally speaking, there are two types of passive constructions in Mandarin, differing from the existence or absence of passive markers (Xiong & Wang, 2002; Lu, 2004). The commonly used passives markers consist of '*BÈI*', '*YÓU*', '*SHÒU*', '*RÀNG*', and '*JÌAO*', among which the BÈI-structure takes priority in formal contexts, while special markers such as *RÀNG* and *JÌAO* can be used in informal occasions and some oral dialects. In terms of the part of speech of the passive markers, linguists struggle to reach a consensus. Lv (1980) categorized them into prepositions; Ting (1995) and Deng (2003) regarded them as verbs, while Tan (2007) analyzed them as function words.

For the passives with markers, the typical construction is [patient + passive marker + agent + predicate], and the agent, either animate or inanimate, is also omissible in English as in sentences (4) and (5).

(4) fèngxiá de tóufā hé yīfú dōu BÈI lùshuǐ zhānshī le
Fengxia POSS[2] hair and clothes all PASS dew soak PRT
'Fengxia's hair and clothes were soaked from the dew.'

(5) wǒmén BÈI jíhé dào yī kuài kōng dìshàng
we PASS summon to one CL empty field
'We were all summoned over to an empty field.'

The above two sentences (4) and (5) present two types of BÈI-constructions with and without an agent, and the rest constituents of the sentences are consistent with the prototype. Given the syntactic flexibility of Mandarin and the function of the context, the passive structure can also be expressed without the aid of passive markers, namely, unmarked passives, as in sentence (6).

(6) tǒng dǐ zhǔlàn la
cauldron bottom burn out PRT
'The bottom of the cauldron is burned out.'

On the face of it, the structure of unmarked passives is the same as sentences in the active voice, which is constructed with the grammatical subject followed by the predicate stating the action performed by the subject. However, the difference lies in that the grammatical subject in unmarked passives receives the action, being the patient. Sentence (6) omits the agent of the action, namely, the person who burns out the cauldron. It is also grammatically accurate to form a passive equivalence by adding a passive marker, an agent, or a combination of them between the grammatical subject and the predicate.

2.3 The meaning and use of the passive construction

The passive can be regarded as "a focus construction that puts the patient in the subject position" (Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia, 2016, p.355) in order to de-emphasize the agent, weakening the position of "who/what does/did an action" (Swan, 2005, p. 387). In a word, the passive construction in both English and Mandarin works by syntactically switching the places of the original subject and the object to convey the passive meaning semantically. The use of the passive construction can be concerned from two perspectives when the passive voice is supposed to be used rather than the active voice or middle voice; and when the explicit agent is required (Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia, 2016, p.361). The two aspects somewhat overlap.

[2] List of abbreviations

CL	classifier
NEG	negation
PASS	passive
PERF	perfect tense
POSS	possessive
PRT	particle

Fairclough (1989) agreed that the de-promotion of the agent weakens redundancy or "obfuscation of agent and causality" (p. 125). Thompson (1987, p. 497-499) and Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016, p.362) pointed out a few occasions where the passive voice should be used rather than the active voice, which are universal in both Mandarin and English. First, when the agent is unknown, general, or redundant to say, or the speaker/ writer is being evasive, the passive voice should be used as in sentence (7).

(7) wǒ shuō rén sǐ le jiùyào BÈI máidiào
I tell people die PRT will PASS bury
'I told him that after people die, they are buried,'

There are no agents in sentence (7) in Mandarin and English because it is redundant or unnecessary to mention who is going to bury dead people. Besides, the passive voice can also be used when the speaker/writer wants to emphasize the action itself or the target who experiences the action instead of the performer of the action.

(8) yǒuqìng shàngkè shí tūrán hūndǎo le BÈI sòng dào yīyuàn
Youqing class during suddenly faint PRT PASS send to hospital
'During class, Youqing suddenly fainted and was sent to the hospital.'

In sentence (8), both the original Mandarin sentence and its English translation adopt the passive voice because the action that 'Youqing was sent to the hospital' is the part that the author wants to emphasize, rather than who sent Youqing to the hospital. The passive is also employed when the patient or theme is more relevant to the context, making the meaning cohere.

Huddleston (1971), Shintani (1979), and Biber (1993) pointed out that the passive voice is more frequently used in scientific and formal writings than in conversational and fictional contexts. Gross et al. (2002) also defined scientific writing as "an objective enterprise" (p. 231), which is supposed to be "impersonal and thing-centered" (Leong, 2021). The passive voice, compared to the active voice, lends a more objective, neutral, and impartial tone when proposing a scientific hypothesis or stating a conclusion.

Another topic that has been extensively debated is whether the passive voice is related to conveying adversity in two languages. In terms of the Mandarin passive voice, researchers fail to reach a consensus on whether the passive describes unpleasant or undesirable things. Lv and Zhu (1952) held the view that the action undertaken by the grammatical subject in the passive is always unpleasant. This was supported by Hashimoto (1987), who generalized the behaviors stated by the *BÈI*-construction as invariably harmful. Li (1994) agreed that the passive marker *BÈI* in Mandarin already connotes a meaning of suffering from misfortune, which has implied that events expressed in a passive voice are unhappy, miserable, and adverse. However, Liu (1956) denied the negative meaning of passive construction. He believed that the patient/theme of the passive could experience either unpleasant or pleasant actions. Subsequently, Li (1980) and Ma (1981) pointed out that meaning conveyed by the passive is not determined by the sentence pattern itself yet is related to various components of the sentence, such as the predicate and the object. However, compared to the Mandanrin, as mentioned previously, Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2016) regarded the BE-passive as a semantically neutral (p.357) construction, while the GET-passive mostly conveys negative outcomes (Sawasaki, 2000) or the GET-passive can equally give expression to both negative and positive results (Sussex, 1982; Sasaki, 1999). English passives are more likely to be perceived as not containing any emotional attitude.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study design

In order to comparatively analyze the use of passive constructions in Mandarin and its corresponding translation into English, a well-known modernist novel named *To live* by Yu Hua, one of the greatest contemporary Chinese writers, is selected as the source language. The English version is translated by Michael Berry, functioning as the target language. There are a few reasons for the researcher to choose this novel. First, it consists of many passive constructions in both Mandarin and English, providing a rich data source for research. Secondly, it includes not only formal written expressions but also many colloquial everyday expressions, increasing the diversity of the data. Finally, the novel has been read so many times that the research has a very clear understanding of the plot and the emotion behind the words, which is conducive to the analysis of this novel. A mixed qualitative and quantitative method is used in the current research.

3.2 Procedure

A few steps have been included before the process of data analysis. Firstly, both books are read carefully to make sure there is a full understanding and comprehension of the content. Then, all Mandarin passive constructions and their corresponding English passive equivalence or non-equivalence are identified by the researcher. Each case of Mandarin and English is examined and categorized into a few lists in light of the types of structures in English and the meaning of the context.

4. Findings and discussion

Table 1 presents all the Mandarin passive constructions existing in the original of Yu Hua's novel. The rest of the columns demonstrate how Mandarin passives are translated into English and their respective percentages. Specifically, they indicate the choice of the English translation of each type of Mandarin passive in detail.

Mandarin passive constructions & Numbers	English Constructions	Number	Percentage
BÈI-construction 102	BE-construction	62	60.8%
	GET-structure	2	2.0%
	HAVE-structure	0	0.0%
	Active Voice	38	37.3%
RÀNG-construction 11	BE-construction	2	18.2%
	GET-structure	0	0.0%
	HAVE-structure	0	0.0%
	Active Voice	9	81.8%
YÓU-construction 5	BE-construction	1	20.0%
	GET-structure	0	0.0%
	HAVE-structure	0	0.0%
	Active Voice	4	80.0%
JÌAO-construction 1	BE-structure	1	100.0%
SHÒU-construction 1	Active Voice	1	100.0%
No passive marker 57	BE-construction	40	70.2%
	GET-structure	1	1.8%
	HAVE-structure	2	3.5%
	Active Voice	14	24.6%

Table 1 The Translation of Mandarin Passive Constructions

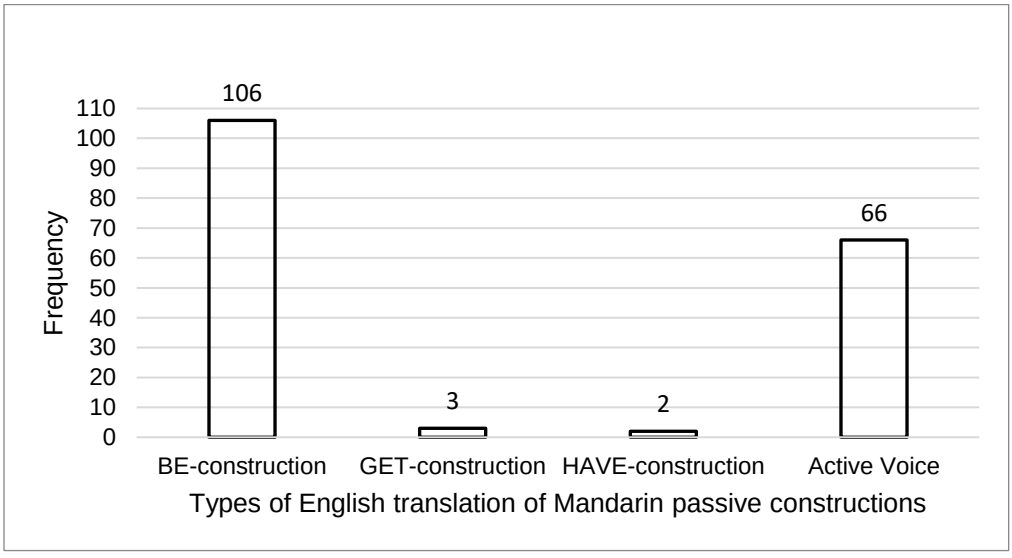

Figure 1 The Distribution of English translation of Mandarin passive constructions

From Figure 1 above, it is clearly identifiable that most sentences in the Mandarin passive voice are translated into the equivalent English passive voice, which predominantly takes the BE-construction as a typical representative, occupying 59.9% in total. 37.3% of passive structures are changed into active voices in English. Four examples below are given to better explain the four types of the translation of Mandarin passives, namely, BE-construction, GET-construction, HAVE-construction, and being changed into the active voice.

(9) shí lái mén dàpáo dōu YÓU mǎchē lā zhe
ten about CL cannon all PASS horse pull PRT
'There were about ten cannons being pulled by horses.'
(10) wǒ bù rěnxīn kàn tā BÈI zǎidiào
I NEG stand watch it PASS slaughter
'I couldn't stand to watch it (the ox) get slaughtered.'
(11) nà kē tóuzǐ lǐmiàn wākōng le guàn le shuǐyín
that CL dice inside dig PERF-PRT fill PERF-PRT mercury
'That dice had a hole dug out of it and was filled with mercury.'

(12) tā diē dōu RÀNG tā qì sǐ la
his dad even PASS he piss off death PRT
'His dad was even pissed off to death by him.'

If the sentence is translated into English passive equivalence, it should look like the translation above. Nevertheless, the author uses the active sentence 'he even drove his own father to the grave' to transfer the focus of the sentence from the patient (dad) to the agent (he).

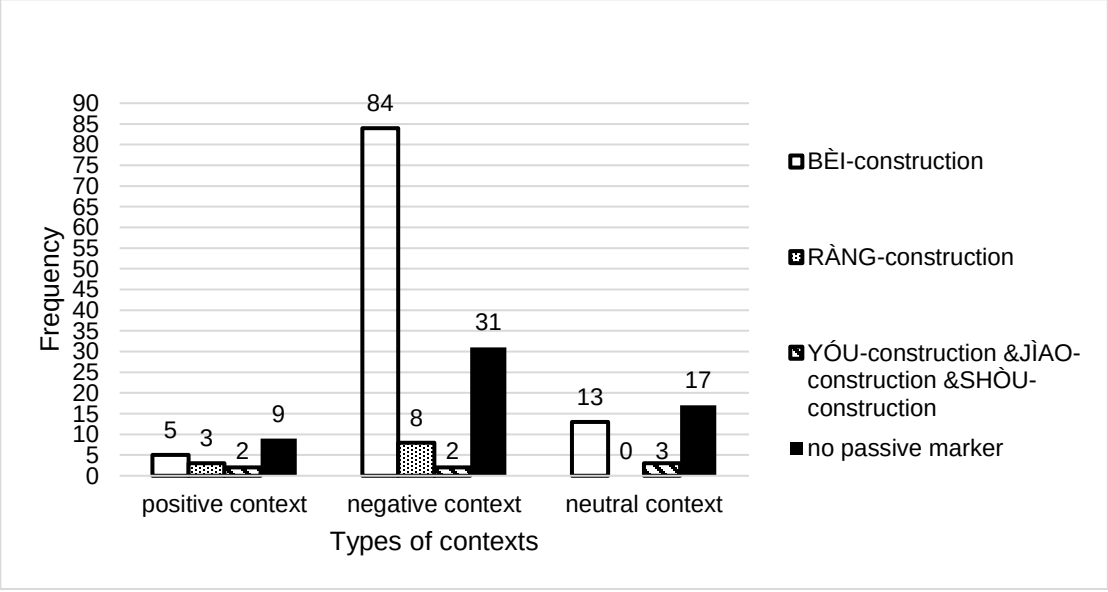

Figure 2 The Distribution of Mandarin passive constructions in different contexts.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of Mandarin passive constructions in positive, negative, and neutral contexts. Since the cases of *YÓU*-construction, *JÌAO*-construction, and *SHÒU*-construction rarely occur, they are grouped together in this figure. As noted in the previous section, the use of passives is always related to the meaning of the context, indicating the "speaker's attitude towards the action described" (Xiao et al., 2006) and the positive, negative, or neutral consequences. From Figure 2, it can be clearly observed that Mandarin passives are mostly employed in negative contexts, accounting for more than 70.6%, among which the *BÈI*-construction and the construction without any passive markers. Of the Mandarin passives, 18.6% are associated with neutral contexts such as describing the environment.

(13) zuòmèng yě xiǎngbùdào wǒ huì BÈI bìdiào
dream even imagine (NEG) I will PASS execute
'Even in my dreams, I never imagined I'd be executed!'

Sentence (13) is the most prototypical Mandarin BÈI-construction that expresses the negative meaning, highlighting the patient who has to suffer from the action. Compared with this sentence, sentences (14) and (15) respectively describe a phenomenon, expressing a neutral meaning of the context and a positive scene.

(14) tiánlǐ de miánhuā yǐ BÈI shōuqǐ
field POSS cotton PERF PASS harvest
'The cotton in the fields has already been harvested.'

(15) nàtiān xīnniáng BÈI yíngjìn cūnlǐ láishí
day bride PASS welcome village when
'The day the bride was welcomed into the village.'

From the sentences above, it can be observed that the meaning conveyed by Mandarin passives depends not only on the context but also on the verb used in sentences. In other words, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the passive constructions and the meaning of the context. There may be syntactic similarities between them, yet they should be analyzed separately semantically.

Notably, there are some Mandarin sentences in the active voice that have been translated into English passive constructions, as Figure 3 shows.

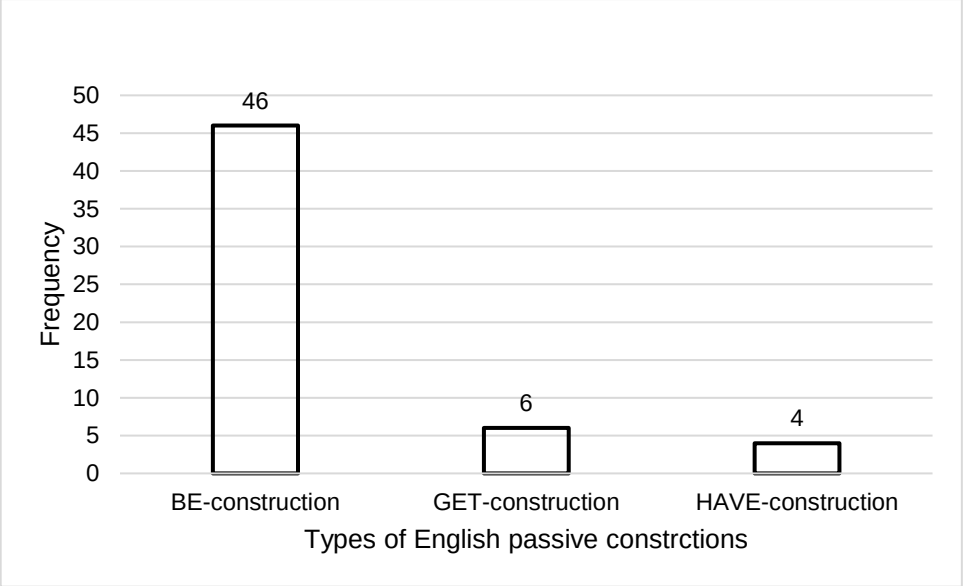

Figure 3 The Distribution of English passives of Mandarin active constructions

Mandarin passives can be translated into the English active voice and vice versa. It is also possible to translate Mandarin active sentences into English passives based on syntactic and semantic needs. In this case, among the Mandarin active sentences which are translated into English passive constructions, most of them adopt the prototypical BE-construction followed by the GET-construction and HAVE-construction. For example,

(16) chénglǐ tiāntiān dōu zài sǐ rén
city every day PRT PRT-PRES die people
'There are people dying every day.'

The original sentence in Mandarin is in active voice, which tends to describe a result, and it could also be translated into the English active voice as well. However, the translator chooses to use the passive voice, changing it into "there are people getting killed there every day". It emphasizes how and why people die, namely, people are forced to die, as opposed to other means such as suicide, implying reluctance and negativity of the context.

In order to answer the third research question of whether the choice of Mandarin passive markers is statistically related to the meaning of contexts, the Chi-Square Test of Independence is used in SPSS software. The result is listed as follows.

Passives * Contexts Crosstabulation						
			Contexts			Total
			negative	neutral	positive	
Passives	BÈI-construction	Count	84	13	5	102
		Expected Count	72	19	10.9	102
		% within Contexts	67.20%	39.40%	26.30%	57.60%
	No passive marker	Count	31	17	9	57
		Expected Count	40.3	10.6	6.1	57
		% within Contexts	24.80%	51.50%	47.40%	32.20%
	RÀNG-construction	Count	8	0	3	11
		Expected Count	7.8	2.1	1.2	11
		% within Contexts	6.40%	0.00%	15.80%	6.20%
	YÓU/JÌAO/SHÒU-construction	Count	2	3	2	7
		Expected Count	4.9	1.3	0.8	7
		% within Contexts	1.60%	9.10%	10.50%	4.00%
Total	Count		125	33	19	177
	Expected Count		125	33	19	177
	% within Contexts		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00 %

Table 2 The Crosstabulation of Mandarin Passive Constructions and Contexts

Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.319a	6	<.001	<.001
Likelihood Ratio	26.168	6	<.001	<.001
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	25.385			<.001
N of Valid Cases	177			

a. 5 cells (41.7%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .75.

Table 3 The Result of the Chi-Square Test of Independence

From the above two tables, it can be seen that the use of different Mandarin passive constructions is highly statistically significant (p<0.001) when related to the meaning of contexts. To be more specific, it is reasonable to assume that in negative contexts, it is more likely to choose the *BÈI*-construction, while in neutral and positive contexts, passive constructions without passive markers are more pervasive.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

In summary, the research has revealed that the Mandarin passive voice can be translated both into the English passive voice and English active voice according to the varied meaning of contexts. To be more specific, Mandarin passive constructions are mostly translated into the typical BE-construction, while the use of the GET-construction and HAVE-construction is quite limited. In addition, the use of Mandarin passives is mainly related to the negative context followed by the neutral context; only a few passive

constructions are used to convey positive emotion. Furthermore, the choice of the type of Mandarin passives is connected with the meaning of contexts according to the significant *p*-value ($p<0.001$). It is safe to predict that the *BÈI*-construction is frequently used in negative contexts, while passive constructions without any indicators are more suitable for neutral contexts. As for the positive contexts, it seems more common to use the active voice.

In addition, just as the Mandarin passive voice can be translated into the English active voice, it is permissible to translate the Mandarin active voice into the English passive voice. As two languages that belong to different language families, it is difficult to find the corresponding syntactic structure of Mandarin and English completely despite the fact that they do share similarities in some grammatical respects. Being fully aware of the linguistic characteristics, including the form, use, and meaning of the two languages, is required, especially for translators. It is not advisable to translate every sentence according to the syntactic feature rigidly while the semantic and pragmatic practical meaning and use are supposed to be taken into consideration. This research can also be a reference for the audience who are interested in the differences between Mandarin and English passive constructions.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the source data is slightly limited because the research is conducted only based on one book and its English version. The way that the author uses Mandarin passives and the translator translates them into English, either passive equivalence or non-equivalence, implies their preferences. Consequently, it also likely fails to analyze whether the English translation of a particular Mandarin passive construction is the translator's choice or discourse choice. Additionally, the current research does not subdivide Mandarin passive constructions with different tenses and aspects, such as the past perfect, simple present, and past continuous. In future research, larger samples and more specific categories could be collected and classified to produce a more credible result.

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