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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The E-C Translation of Passive Voice in UN Legal Documents

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| **ABSTRACT**

Though scholars have thoroughly explored the translation methods of passive voice, few studied the translation of passive sentences in UN legal documents. This research aims to identify the most frequently applied method of translating passive voice in UN legal documents. To this end, I adopt the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol as a case study. I employ quantitative analysis to analyze the frequency that the translation methods are used in the translation of the two legal documents. I apply qualitative analysis to analyze how and why these methods are employed. The result testifies to the correctness of the hypothesis, namely, the passive voice in UN legal documents is most often translated into passive voice in Chinese. After a thorough analysis of the parallel texts, I go on to suggest that translators need to choose translation methods based on the specific context. I hope this research will provide inspiration for the translation of international legal texts.

1. Introduction
The passive voice is a common grammatical phenomenon in English, especially legal English. Given that the passive voice tends to use non-human nouns as subjects, it is impersonal and more objective. According to Xiong (2000), legal English is characterized by solemnity, objectivity, and fairness. The features of passive voice are in line with those of legal English. Therefore, the passive voice is prevalent in legal English. Cai (2012) found that legal documents of the United Nations, one of the most authoritative legal texts, also contain a large number of passive sentences. Thus the translation of passive voice is essential to the overall translation of UN legal documents.

2. Literature Review
To explore the E-C translation methods for passive voice in UN legal documents, I need to study the general translation methods for passive voice. But before that, it is imperative to review the definition of passive voice and the differences between English and Chinese in passive voice.

2.1 Passive Voice
Voice, the form of a verb used to illustrate the relationship between the subject and the object, is divided into two categories: the active voice and the passive voice. According to Li (2011), the active voice indicates that the subject is the agent ("doer") of the action, while the passive voice indicates that the subject is the recipient ("receptor") of the action.

Wen (2015) believes that the passive voice can be used for multiple reasons:

- The passive voice is useful to avoid blame.

- The passive voice often shows a neutral or objective tone.
- The passive voice can be appropriate when the actor is unimportant, unknown, or obvious.
- The passive voice is useful to emphasize something by putting it at the beginning of the sentence.
- A passive-voice construction allows the writer to use the same subject twice.

According to Lian (2010), passive voice can be divided into two categories: syntactic passive and notional passive. Syntactic passive refers to the "real" passive voice, which expresses the meaning in the passive form of a verb. In English, the basic form of syntactic passive is "patient+be/get/become +past participle". For example, "The picture is taken". But in Chinese, the basic form of syntactic passive is "patient+passive marker+verb". For example, "他被打了". Notional passive, the other category of passive voice, means expressing passivity in an active form. The basic structure is "patient+verb in an active form" in both English and Chinese. For example, "The meal tastes good" in English and "饭尝起来好吃" in Chinese.

Svartvik (1996) divided English passive sentences into those referring to the agent and those without referring to the agent. In an English passive sentence, we can leave out the agent or the 'doer', or we can place the 'doer' in a prepositional phrase (by + 'doer') after the past participle. Chinese passive sentences can also be categorized into two types: those referring to the agent and those without referring to the agent. In a Chinese passive sentence, we can leave out the 'doer', or we can place the 'doer' after the passive marker.

2.2 Differences Between English and Chinese in Passive Voice
Comparatively speaking, English uses more passive voice than Chinese. Within passive voice, English and Chinese also see big differences. For syntactic passive, English passive sentences are much clearer with the basic form of "be/get/become+ past participle", so it is relatively easy to identify the passive meanings. The structure of Chinese syntactic passive, however, is different. The basic form is "passive marker+verb" and there is no change in the form of the verb, which means readers need to bear in mind the passive markers in order to identify the passive meanings. Wang (2019) believes there are multiple passive markers indicating passive meanings in Chinese, such as "由", "为", "所", "受", "遭", "让", etc. For notional passive, Chinese passive meanings are often expressed in active forms, which means notional passive is more common in Chinese. Compared with syntactic passive, notional passive is more covert. All in all, the complex nature of the Chinese passive voice makes it more difficult to identify.

2.3 Translation of Passive Voice
The differences between English and Chinese in passive voice determine that different methods are employed in translating English passive sentences. Sun and Zhou (2010) propose three methods: (a) translating English passive sentences into Chinese passive sentences, (b) translating English passive sentences into Chinese active sentences, (c) converting English passive sentences into other expressions that convey the same meaning. The above three methods have all been applied to the translation of passive voice in legal English. Sun (2002) and Zhang (1998) adopt the first two methods in their books on legal translation. Zhang (2016) adopts the third method in one example in his book *Legal English Translation Course*. He states that translators should apply flexible techniques to achieve faithfulness in content and expressiveness in language.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses
The translation of passive voice has been thoroughly explored. However, few scholars researched the translation of passive voice in UN legal documents, nor did they point out which method is more commonly used. Given this, the research questions of this report are as follows:

1. Are the general translation methods for passive voice applicable to the translation of UN legal documents?
2. How are these methods employed?
3. Which method is more frequently applied in the translation of UN legal documents?

The hypothesis is that the three methods are all applicable to the translation of passive voice in UN legal documents. The employment of these methods depends on specific situations. Considering the characteristics of Chinese legal texts, I hypothesize that English passive sentences are more likely to be rendered into Chinese passive sentences than active sentences or other sentence patterns.

4. Methods
This section describes the process of the research. It includes three parts: methodology, data collection, and data analysis.

4.1 Methodology

This is a case study. Case study approach is often chosen for exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research. It also provides a platform for researchers to collect data with different methodologies. A case study can be the most effective approach for this research on legal translation.

The methods adopted in this research are quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis aims to examine the frequency of passive voice and the three methods used to translate the passive voice in UN legal documents. The qualitative method is employed to analyze the situations where the three methods appear in the texts after data has been categorized.

4.2 Data Collection

To ensure the scientific nature of the study, the material should be more than one UN legal document with both English and Chinese versions. The English texts should include enough passive sentences so as to bring out fair results for this research. After comparing several UN legal documents, I decided to take the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change(hereinafter referred to as UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change(hereinafter referred to as the Kyoto Protocol) as the objects of research. As authority and authenticity always come first in academic research, I downloaded the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and their Chinese translations from https://unfccc.int/, the official website of UNFCCC.

4.2.1 Quantitative Data Collection

There are 26 articles in the UNFCCC and 28 articles in the Kyoto Protocol. I counted the total number of sentences in each document. Then I read the two documents sentence by sentence and marked all the passive sentences. I used the "search" function of Word and PDF reader and entered passive markers to check whether there are passive sentences neglected. Then I counted the number of passive sentences.

After that, I analyzed each passive sentence and its Chinese translation to identify the method used in translation. I categorized these sentences according to the methods and marked them. Then I counted the number of sentences that used each method respectively.

4.2.2 Qualitative Data Collection

There are three general methods to translate passive sentences: (a) passive voice→passive voice, (b) passive voice→active voice, (c) conversion of expression. Each method can be subdivided into two categories. I extract two typical examples from each category for detailed analysis.

Throughout the course, I found some problems and provided solutions to them.
The first problem: Many sentences contain passive construction, such as past participle as postpositive attributive. Confusion arises as to whether they count as passive voice.

Solution: I revisited the definition of passive voice and decided that such passive construction is not the passive voice in the strict sense. I only take passive sentences as objects of research.

The second problem: When analyzing the translation method, I found that syntactic passive in English is often translated into notional passive in Chinese. This may shed light on the characteristics of passive voice between English and Chinese and give inspiration for translation.

Solution: I calculated the frequency of passive sentences that are rendered into Chinese notional passive and syntactic passive respectively, trying to verify the assumption.

4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the key step to reach a conclusion. I employ both quantitative and qualitative analysis in the research.

4.3.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Based on the number of passive sentences and the total number of sentences, I calculated the frequency of passive sentences. Based on the number of sentences that use each method and the overall number of passive sentences, I calculated the frequencies of the three methods. The quantitative data were made into tables. I compared the data within a table and between the tables to find commonalities and differences. Such comparisons serve to verify the hypothesis made in the introduction.

4.3.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

There are six categories of translation: (a) syntactic passive→syntactic passive; (b) syntactic passive→notional passive; (c) passive sentence→active sentence; (d) non-agent sentence→ non-subject sentence; (e) conversion of word class; (f) conversion of words. I selected two sentences for each category and thoroughly analyzed each sentence in consideration of its context. I will illustrate how these methods are applied in translation, what outcomes have been achieved as well as what questions have been solved.

5. Results

This section discusses the results of data analysis and the findings behind the data. I divided the results into two parts: quantitative results and qualitative findings. Quantitative results focus on the general use of different translation methods. Qualitative findings view the translation methods in detail and explain the rationale.

5.1 Quantitative Results

I calculated the frequencies of passive sentences in English texts, three methods used in translation, and the frequencies of notional passive in passive voice of the translated texts. The results are shown in the following tables:

Table 1
The Frequencies of passive sentences in UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol

	Number of passive sentences	Frequency
UNFCCC	80	80/263
Kyoto Protocol	71	71/210

There are 80 passive sentences in the UNFCCC, representing 30.4% of the total 263 sentences. Of the 210 sentences in the Kyoto Protocol, 71 are passive ones, accounting for 33.8%. The result attests to the importance of passive sentences in legal documents.

As has been mentioned above, the three methods to translate passive voice are: (a) translating English passive sentences into Chinese passive sentences, (b) translating English passive sentences into Chinese active sentences, (c) Converting English passive sentences into expressions that convey the same meaning. The application of them is shown as follows:

Table 2
The Frequencies of the Three Methods in Translating the UNFCCC

Methods to translate passive voice	Frequency
Passive voice→passive voice	48/80
Passive voice→active voice	30/80
Conversion into other sentence patterns	2/80

There are 80 passive sentences in the UNFCCC. Among them, 48 are translated into passive voice in Chinese, 30 into active voice, and 2 into other sentence patterns.

Table 3
The Frequencies of the Three Methods in Translating the Kyoto Protocol

Methods to translate passive voice	Frequency
Passive voice→passive voice	55/71
Passive voice→active voice	14/71
Conversion into other sentence patterns	2/71

There are 71 passive sentences in the Kyoto Protocol. Among them, 55 are translated into passive voice in Chinese, 14 into active voice, and 2 into other sentence patterns.

It can be drawn from Table 2 and Table 3 that the three methods are all applied in the translation of UN legal documents and that passive voice in the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol are translated into passive voice in most cases.

Table 4
The Frequencies of Notional Passive in Passive Voice of the Translation

Syntactic passive	Notional passive/passive voice
The UNFCCC	19/48
The Kyoto Protocol	29/55

The passive sentences in the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol are all syntactic passive. Of the 48 passive sentences that are translated into passive voice in the Chinese version of UNFCCC, 19 are notional passive. In the Kyoto Protocol, 29 out of 55 passive sentences are converted from syntactic passive to notional passive. We can conclude that syntactic passive in English is sometimes translated into notional passive in Chinese.

In sum, the three methods to translate passive sentences are all applicable to the translation of the two UN legal documents. And the first method (translating passive voice into passive voice) is most frequently applied. The answers to the research questions conform to the hypotheses.

5.2 Qualitative Findings

In this part, I will draw representative examples from articles containing passive voice to analyze how they are translated and why. There are 6 categories in total and I will provide 2 examples for each category.

5.2.1 Passive Voice→Passive Voice

As it is shown in the quantitative results, translating passive voice into passive voice is the most frequently used method. Sun has said that the passive voice is common in both English and Chinese legal texts (2000). The passive voice is kept in translation to remain faithful to the original intention or to demonstrate the objectivity of legal texts. When translating English syntactic passive into Chinese passive voice, there are two approaches: syntactic passive→syntactic passive; syntactic passive→notional passive.

Syntactic Passive→Syntactic Passive. In this approach, English passive sentences are translated into Chinese passive sentences with passive markers such as "被", "由", "予以", etc. The basic structure is "patient+passive marker+(agent)+verb".

Example 1
For the purposes of paragraphs 1 and 2 above, any instrument deposited by a regional economic integration organization shall not be counted as additional to those deposited by States members of the organization.

为上述第 1 和第 2 款的目的，区域经济一体化组织所交存的任何文书不应被视为该组织成员国所交存文书之外的额外文书。

In the English sentence, "any instrument deposited by a regional economic integration organization" is the patient of the verb "count". However, it is put at the beginning as the subject for emphasis. And the predicate is "be counted" (be+past participle). Thus the English sentence is syntactic passive. In the translation, the "区域经济一体化组织所交存的任何文书" remains the subject and the translator added "被" to indicate the passive voice. By doing this, the translated sentence achieves the same effect as the original sentence－to emphasize the patient.

Example 2
Expert review teams shall be coordinated by the secretariat and shall be composed of experts selected from those nominated by Parties to the Convention and, as appropriate, by intergovernmental organizations, in accordance with guidance provided for this purpose by the Conference of the Parties.

专家审评组应根据《公约》缔约方会议为此目的提供的指导，由秘书处进行协调，并由从《公约》缔约方和在适当情况下政府间组织提名的专家中遴选出的成员组成。

A passive voice construction allows the writer to use the same subject twice. In the English sentence, "expert review teams" function as the subject of two predicates. If the passive voice had not been used here, this sentence would have been translated into two separate sentences: "根据《公约》缔约方会议为此目的提供的指导，秘书处协调专家评审组。从《公约》缔约方和在适当情况下政府间组织提名的专家中遴选出的成员组成专家评审组。" For one thing, the active voice version is not as concise as the passive voice. For another, by using the agent "秘书处" and "专家" as the subject, this version is not as objective as the passive voice. Therefore, to ensure the objectivity and conciseness of legal documents, the translator maintained the passive voice in Chinese.

Syntactic Passive→Notional Passive. Some verbs in Chinese can express passive meanings in themselves. Under such circumstances, there is no need to add passive markers to Chinese sentences. Syntactic passive in English is thus translated into notional passive in Chinese. The structure of the Chinese notional passive is "patient+verb".

Example 1
Any emission reduction units, or any part of an assigned amount, which a Party acquires from another Party in accordance with the provisions of Article 6 or of Article 17 shall be added to the assigned amount for the acquiring Party.

一缔约方根据第六条或第十七条的规定从另一缔约方获得的任何减少排放单位或一个分配数量的任何部分，应计入获得缔约方的分配数量。

In the English sentence, the agent is not stated because it is unimportant. What is important is the act of "adding". To highlight the action, passive voice is used. The Chinese translation retains the passive voice to emphasize the action. Since the Chinese verb "计入" can convey passive meanings in itself, no passive marker is added and the syntactic passive in English is rendered into a notional passive in Chinese.

Example 2
Thereafter, ordinary sessions of the Conference of the Parties shall be held every year unless otherwise decided by the Conference of the Parties.

其后，除缔约方会议另有决定外，缔约方会议的常会应年年举行。

The original English sentence does not specify or imply the agent. To ensure the accuracy of translation, the translator should not add the agent by deduction. The "ordinary sessions of the Conference of the Parties" remains the subject in translation. The Chinese verb "举行" serves as the predicate of the Chinese translation. Though it is active in form, it conveys the passive meaning of "being held". Therefore, the Chinese sentence is notional passive.

To summarize, syntactic passive can be translated into both syntactic passive and notional passive. There are several reasons to retain the passive voice: (a) to emphasize the patient or the action, (b) to remain faithful to the original text in structure, (c) to demonstrate the objectivity and formality of legal texts, (d) to avoid making mistakes on the agent.

5.2.2 Passive Voice→Active Voice
Chinese does not use passive voice as much as English. Some passive sentences, if translated literally, do not conform to the Chinese way of expression. As a result, English passive sentences are sometimes converted into active sentences in Chinese. This conversion is achieved by changing the subject of the original sentence into the object and by converting the passive form of the predicate verb into an active form. But the subject of the translated sentence varies depending on whether the agent is referred to in the original sentence.

Passive Sentence→Active Sentence. If the agent is referred to or implied in the original sentence, the agent will function as the subject of the target sentence. The structure of the translated active sentence is "agent+verb in active form+patient".

Example 1
Taking into account Article 4, paragraph 6, of the Convention, in the implementation of their commitments under this Protocol other than those under this Article, a certain degree of flexibility shall be allowed by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Protocol to the Parties included in Annex I undergoing the process of transition to a market economy.

考虑到《公约》第四条第 6 款，作为本议定书缔约方会议的《公约》缔约方会议，应允许正在向市场经济过渡的附件一所列缔约方在履行其除本条规定的那些承诺以外的承诺方面有一定程度的灵活性。

In the English passive sentence, the subject is "a certain degree of flexibility" and the predicate is "shall be allowed". If translated literally, the Chinese sentence would be "一定程度的灵活性应被允许", which is awkward. To make the Chinese sentence more natural, the agent, "the Conference of the Parties" is drawn to be the subject, and the verb is converted into active form.

Example 2
The rules of procedure of the Conference of the Parties and financial procedures applied under the Convention shall be applied *mutatis mutandis* under this Protocol, except as may be otherwise decided by consensus by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Protocol.

《公约》缔约方会议的议事规则和依《公约》规定采用的财务规则，应在本议定书下比照适用，除非作为本议定书缔约方会议的《公约》缔约方会议以协商一致方式可能另外作出决定。

There are 2 passive structures in the original sentence: "shall be applied" and "may be otherwise decided". The passive structure in the main clause is kept and turned into a notional passive in Chinese while the passive structure in the subordinate clause is converted into an active voice. The reason why the subordinate clause is rendered into active voice is that the sentence has pointed out the agent (the Conference of the Parties) for the act of "deciding".

Non-agent Sentence→Non-subject Sentence. If the original sentence does not contain or indicate the agent, the translation is likely to be a non-subject active sentence. The structure of the translated active sentence is "verb in active form+patient".

Example 1
Suitable modalities should be developed to implement these activities through the relevant bodies of the Convention, taking into account Article 6 of the Convention;

应发展适当方式通过《公约》的相关机构实施这些活动，同时考虑到《公约》第六条；

In this example, the subject is "suitable modalities" and the predicate verb is "develop". "Suitable modalities" is the patient for the act of "developing". If translated directly, it would be "适当方式应被发展". This is not the natural way of expression in Chinese. Therefore, the passive sentence is translated into an active sentence. However, the agent is not referred to in the original sentence. The non-subject sentence is acceptable in Chinese, so the sentence is translated into a non-subject active sentence.

Example 2
Where such methodologies are not used, appropriate adjustments shall be applied according to methodologies agreed upon by the Conference of the Parties serving as the
meeting of the Parties to this Protocol at its first session.

如不使用这种方法学，则应根据作为本议定书缔约方会议的《公约》缔约方会议第一届会议所议定的方法学作出适当调整。

This sentence contains two passive structures: "are not used" and "shall be applied". The agent of the two actions are the same but it is not mentioned in the sentence. With discretion, the translator did not add the subject but translated this sentence into a non-subject sentence.

In a word, Chinese tends to adopt active voice, which means not all passive sentences can remain passive in translation. Some of them must be converted into active voice.

5.2.3 Conversion of Expression
There are also cases where both methods mentioned above are inappropriate. Under such circumstances, the translator needs to convert the expression of the original sentence.

Conversion of Word Class. To keep the original sequence or make the translation more idiomatic, the translator can convert the word class. For instance, the translator can convert the predicate verb into a noun or an adjective.

Example 1
"Party included in Annex I" means a Party included in Annex I to the Convention, as may be amended, or a Party which has made a notification under Article 4, paragraph 2 (g), of the Convention.

"附件一所列缔约方"指《公约》附件一所列缔约方，包括可能作出的修正，或指根据《公约》第四条第 2 款(g)项作出通知的缔约方。

In this example, "may be amended" indicates passive voice. However, neither the agent nor the patient is stated clearly. This makes it difficult to translate this passive voice into a passive or active sentence. The translator changed the word class of "amend" from a verb into a noun and this passive voice is translated into a phrase. In this way, the translation not only conveys the original meaning but also becomes more concise.

Example 2
Various actions to address climate change can be justified economically in their own right and can also help in solving other environmental problems.

应付气候变化的各种行动本身在经济上就能够是合理的，而且还能有助于解决其他环境问题。

In the first half, "can be justified" is the predicate. The agent for the act of "justifying" is unknown, so it is unwise to translate it into an active voice. If it were translated directly into passive voice, the translation would be "能够被证明合理", which is not idiomatic Chinese. In the original sentence, the two clauses connected by "and" share the same subject "various actions to address climate change". To keep such conciseness, the verb "justify" is translated into an adjective "合理的".

Conversion of Words. If the conversion of word class is unable to achieve the target effect, the translator can also replace the verb with other words that can convey the same message.

Example 1
The United Nations, its specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as any State member thereof or observers thereto not Party to the Convention, may be represented at sessions of the Conference of the Parties as observers.

联合国及其专门机构和国际原子能机构，以及它们的非为本公约缔约方的会员国或观察员，均可作为观察员出席缔约方会议的各届会议。

The predicate of the English sentence is "may be represented", an indication of syntactic passive. If we translated this sentence into passive voice, it would be "联合国及其专门机构和国际原子能机构，以及它们的非为本公约缔约方的会员国或观察员，均可作为观察员在缔约方会议的各届会议上被代表。" But "被代表" is not proper Chinese. The agent for the act of "representing" is not stated. If we translated this sentence into active voice, it would be a non-subject sentence: 均可作为观察员在缔约方会议的各届会议上代表联合国及其专门机构和国际原子能机构，以及它们的非为本公约缔约方的会员国或观察员。 However, the point of the sentence is lost, so the only choice is to change the expression. The translator chose the Chinese verb "出席" to fit in the context and convey the meaning.

Example 2
The United Nations, its specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as any State member thereof or observers thereto not party to the Convention, may be represented at sessions of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Protocol as observers.

联合国及其专门机构和国际原子能机构，以及它们的非为《公约》缔约方的成员国或观察员，均可派代表作为观察员出席作为本议定书缔约方会议的《公约》缔约方会议的各届会议。

This example is similar to example 1. The predicate in the English sentence is "may be represented". If translated directly, it would be "被代表", which does not conform to the Chinese expression. The Chinese translation converts the verb "represent" into a noun "代表" and adds the verb "出席" to make the translated sentence more smooth.

To sum up, the choice of translation methods depends on the context. The most common practice is to translate passive voice into syntactic passive or notional passive. If the agent is mentioned or indicated, the sentence can also be translated into active voice. When the first two methods are infeasible, the translator can convert the word class or the words as long as the message is correctly conveyed.

6. Conclusion
In conclusion, the result testifies to the correctness of the hypotheses. The translator can employ one of the following three methods to translate the passive voice in UN legal documents: (a) translating English passive sentences into Chinese passive sentences, (b) translating English passive sentences into Chinese active sentences, (c) converting English passive sentences into other expressions that convey the same meaning. The three methods are in hierarchical order. To remain faithful to the original text and showcase the objectivity of the legal text, the first method is the primary choice. However, due to the differences between Chinese and English, the first method does not work all the time. If the direct translation is unidiomatic in Chinese, the second method should be considered. The last resort is the third method, which conveys the same meaning though different in form. Translators should consider both the original text and the target language to decide on the method.

The research is based on the literature review but further develops the literature. It narrows down the scope of study to the translation of UN legal documents and deepens the research on legal translation. Through this research, I deepened my understanding of passive voice and legal translation. This study will serve to provide insights for those undertaking legal translation for international organizations.

Shortcomings are inevitable in this research. Despite the proofreading, errors are still unavoidable and further improvement is necessary. Besides, due to the limit of time and ability, the texts extracted for analysis are in small quantities, and it would be more convincing if more legal documents are included in the analysis process. A possible direction for future research is to study the translation of post modifiers that use the past participle to convey passive meanings.

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