

10.9 Transformations (with chéng)

Since learning a language inevitably involves errors of perception or translation, such expressions involving transformations will be useful. Some are formed with chéng, itself a verb meaning ‘become’ (cf. chéng le yí ge shén ‘became a spirit’ in the ‘temple’ – dialogue in Unit 9). Added to compatible verbs, chéng introduces a ‘transform’ – the product of a transformation. Frequently, the ‘thing transformed’ is marked by bǎ. Here are examples:

Tā bǎ zhuā nèi ge zì xiěchéng
zhǎo le.

She has written the character *zhuā* (抓)
as *zhào* (爪).

Tā bǎ shuǎi nèi ge zì kànchéng yòng le.	He read the characters <i>shuai</i> (甩) as <i>yong</i> (用).
Tā bǎ xīhuan nèi ge cí shuōchéng xīwàng le.	She pronounced the word <i>xihuan</i> as <i>xiwang</i> .
Qǐng bāng wǒ bǎ zhèi jǐ ge jùzi fānyìchéng Yīngwén.	Please help me translate these sentences into English.

Interestingly, standard transliterations of the two hotels (fāndiàn), the Hilton and the Sheraton, are very similar in Chinese. The first is Xī'ěrdùn; the second is Xièlādùn (at least in one of its renditions). It is easy to hear one as the other:

Nǐ shuō Xī'ěrdùn, wǒ bǎ tā tīngchéng Xièlādùn le!	[When] you said 'Hilton', I heard it as Sheraton.
---	---

Exercise 4. Provide translations for:

1. We often translate duìbuqǐ as 'sorry', but actually, it's not quite the same.
2. You can't call 'good' 'bad', or 'bad' 'good'.
3. His book has been translated into Chinese.
4. First year students often read 也 as 他, or 找 as 我.
5. My driver heard Sheraton as Hilton, so I ended up staying far from the office.

10.10 Bèi 'by'

In English, a sentence such as 'The police arrested them' can be recast, for various rhetorical reasons, as 'they were arrested by the police', or 'they got arrested by the police'. The agent can be stated, using the preposition 'by'; or it can be omitted: 'They were ~ got arrested'. Sometimes the agent is unknown; at other times, there are reasons not to state the agent – avoiding responsibility, for example. In many languages, the shift from starting with the agent (the police) to starting with the 'patient' (the people arrested), and the consequent changes to the verb ('arrested > was/got arrested') are characterized by the terms 'active' to 'passive'.

Chinese verbs, as we have seen, are uncommitted to many of the categories that are taken for granted in English and many European languages: tense, person (she sings, they sing), and passive too. In many cases – perhaps most cases – where English has a passive, Chinese is noncommittal and simply lets the context determine how a particular noun relates to the verb. The following pair of Chinese sentences are structurally identical; yet in most contexts, the first is translated by an English passive, the second by an active:

Nín zěnmē chēnghū?	How [should] you be addressed?
Nín zěnmē yòng?	How do you use [this]?

However, there are cases in Chinese which do bear a resemblance to what in European tradition has been referred to as passive voice. These involve the word bèi (or one of several other words whose function is nearly synonymous with bèi). The pair of sentences below (utilizing the verb zhuā ‘arrest; seize’) illustrate:

Jǐngchá bǎ tāmen zhuāqǐlai le. The police arrested them.
Tāmen bèi <jǐngchá> zhuāqǐlai le. They got arrested <by the police>.

In both languages, agent and ‘patient’ – person affected – are rearranged so as to make the patient the starting point. While in the Chinese, bèi cannot be omitted, its object, jǐngchá, can be. (In the English example, ‘by the police’ can be omitted, but not just ‘the police’.) It is noteworthy, however, that the verb in Chinese undergoes no modification – it is zhuā in both cases (cf. English ‘arrested’ but ‘got arrested’). However, under some conditions – and perhaps more often in some regions than others – the Chinese verb can be modified by the addition of gěi (‘give’ in one of its diverse functions) before the verb.

Tāmen <bèi jǐngchá> gěi zhuāqǐlai le. They got arrested <by the police>.

The addition of gěi may add an additional nuance of commiseration or regret. (The use of ‘got’ in English, rather than the more neutral ‘have been’, may serve the same purpose.) The possibility of adding gěi to the verb makes the structural comparison between English and Chinese more compelling. But regardless of the structural similarities, bèi, like its active counterpart bǎ, has certain conditions attached to it which makes the Chinese construction with bèi much less common than English passives. In most cases – not all – bèi (and its counterparts) only appear with actions which have an adverse effect: with things breaking, being lost or stolen, damaged, etc.

- Tā de zìxíngchē bèi bómǔ
mài le.
O, nà tài kěxī le.
Tā shuō qí zìxíngchē tài wēixiǎn le!

His bike got sold by [my] aunt.
Oh, what a pity.
She said that riding bikes was too dangerous.
- Wǒmen zǎoshàng liù diǎn bèi
chǎoxǐng le.
Bèi háizimen ma?
Bù, bèi lājīchē.

We got woken up at 6:00 am.
By the kids?
No, by rubbish trucks.
- Xíngli dōu yǐjīng bèi tāmen
názǒu le.
Nádào nǎlǐ le?
Wǒ bù qīngchu, yěxǔ nádào
wàitou le.

The luggage has already been taken away by them.
Where’d they take it to?
Not sure, maybe they took it outside.

10.10.1. Other options, with gěi, jiào, ràng

It is worth noting that there are alternatives to bèi, some of them more colloquial: jiào, ràng, and gěi (yet again). Unlike bèi, they all have other functions: ràng ‘let’; jiào ‘call’; gěi ‘give; for’. Ràng and jiào require an object, even if a ‘dummy’ rén; but gěi, like bèi, does not.

Zìxíngchē bèi <rén> <gěi> tōu le. [My] bike got stolen by someone.
 Zìxíngchē gěi <rén> <gěi> tōu le.
 Zìxíngchē jiào rén <gěi> tōu le.
 Zìxíngchē ràng rén <gěi> tōu le.

No doubt you have marveled at the versatility of the word gěi, which occurs as a main verb (‘give’) as a CV (‘for [the benefit of]’), as an alternative to bèi ‘by’, and as a signal of the passive turn in the verb (gěi tōu le). Yes, it is possible to find a single sentence containing several gěi’s in different functions; and yes, at times there is ambiguity. But all this is new, and for now, we should focus on the options that are the least problematical – the bèi options. Below are some examples and dialogues that encapsulate what needs to be learned at this point.

10.10.2 What happened?

Since bèi sentences tend to involve comment on misfortunes, questions that express curiosity about events provide a typical lead in:

Usage

Q	Zěnmē yì huí shì? Zěnmē le? Zěnmē gǎo de?	What happened? What’s going on? What the heck?
A	Tā <u>bèi</u> jǐngchá jiàozhù le. (call-stay)	She was stopped by the police.
	Tā <u>bèi</u> qiāng dǎzhòng le. (shoot-hit)	He was gunned down.
	Tāmen <u>bèi</u> fá le.	They were fined.
	Tāmen <u>bèi</u> bǎngjià le. (bind-rack)	They were kidnapped.
	Tā <u>bèi</u> jiéchí le. (coerce-keep)	She was hijacked.
	<u>Bèi</u> kòuyā zài Yīlākè le. (tie up-detain)	[They] were detained in Iraq.
	Tāmen <u>bèi</u> jiéwéi réngzhì. (plunder-as hostage)	They were taken hostage.

Notes

yì huí shì		‘an item of business’; the expression with <u>zěnmē</u> is idiomatic and should be learned as such.
gǎo	V	‘do; make; manage’

jiàozhù	VV	‘call out-stay’, ie ‘pull over’
qiāng	N	‘gun’
dǎzhòng	VV	‘shoot-hit’; with falling-toned <u>zhòng</u> meaning ‘hit [a target]’
fá	V	‘to fine’; cf. <u>fákuǎn</u> VO ‘pay a fine’
jiéwéi rénzhi		‘take-as human-pledge’

10.10.3 Dialogue

Jiǎ has just been told about the arrest of an acquaintance; Yǐ has the details.

Jiǎ	Tīngshuō Lǐ Xīnjié zuótiān bèi <jǐngchá> zhuāzǒu le.	I hear that Li Xinjie got taken off by the police yesterday.
Yǐ	Shì, tā qù yóuxíng le.	Yes, he was demonstrating.
Jiǎ	Yóuxíng? Shénme yóuxíng?	Demonstrating? What demonstration?
Yǐ	Shìwēi yóuxíng.	A protest demonstration.
Jiǎ	Zhēn de ma?	You’re kidding!
Yǐ	Zhēn de.	I’m serious.
Jiǎ	Qù shìwēi shénme?	What was [he] protesting?
Yǐ	Fǎnduì fǔbài.	[He] was protesting corruption.
Jiǎ	Fǔbài?	Corruption?
Yǐ	Fǎnduì dāngdì guānyuán fǔbài.	Yes, [they] were protesting corruption among local officials.
Jiǎ	Tā huì zěnmeyàng ne?	What’ll happen to him?
Yǐ	Tā kěnéng huì bèi guān jǐ ge yuè ba!	He may be locked up for a few months.
Jiǎ	Huì bu huì yǒu ge shěnpàn?	Will there be a trial?
Yǐ	Bù, tā huì bèi fákuǎn, ránhòu huì qiǎnsòng huíjiā.	No, he’ll be fined, then he’ll be sent home.
Jiǎ	Ai, zhēn shì yí jiàn hěn yánzhòng de shì.	Gosh, that’s serious.



Gōng'ān 'Public security'

Notes

zhuā	V	'seize; catch; arrest'; zhuāzǒu 'seize and take off'
yóuxíng	N	'parades'; V 'to parade'
shìwēi	N	'a demonstration'; V 'to protest; demonstrate'
fǎnduì	V	'to oppose; protest'
fǔbài	N	'corruption'
dāngdì		'local'
guānyuán	N	'officials'
guān	V	'to close': <u>bèi guān jǐ ge yuè</u> 'get shut [in] for several months'
shěnpàn	N	'a trial'
fákǔǎn	N	'a fine'; VO 'to pay a fine'
qiǎnsòng	V	'to send back; expel'
yánzhòng	SV	'serious (strict-heavy)'

Exercise 5*a) Translate*

1. We got locked outside and had to call the police to let (ràng) us in.
2. May I borrow (jiè) your camera (zhàoxiàngjī)? / Someone's already borrowed it.
3. My plane tickets and passport got stolen (tōu). / Oh, that's too bad!
4. They stole a car and got arrested by the police!
5. He was fined \$200 for spitting (tǔtán). [VO fá...kuǎn]

b) Provide an English paraphrase for the following:

Wǒ dì-yí cì zài Zhōngguó lǚxíng de shíhou fāsheng de zuì zāogāo de shìqing shì dāng wǒ zài qù Wūlǔmùqí de huǒchē shàng shuǐzháo-le de shíhou, wǒ de hùzhào bèi tōu le. Xíngyùn de shì, língshìguǎn tóngyì mǎshàng fā gěi wǒ yì běn xīn de. Chūménr lǚxíng de rén suǐshí-suǐdì dōu yào zhùyì xiǎotōu. Zài nǎr dōu yíyàng.

Notes

fāsheng	V	‘happen; occur; take place’
zāogāo	Phr	‘too bad; what a pity’
dāng...de shíhou		‘when...’
tōu	V	‘steal’
xìngyùn	SV	‘be fortunate’
lǐngshìguǎn	N	‘consulate’
tóngyì	V	‘agree; approve’
fā	V	‘issue’
chūménr	VO	‘leave home; go out’
suíshí-suídì	Loc	‘whenever and wherever’
xiǎotōu	N	‘crooks; thieves’

10.11 Seeking opinions: a dialogue

Jiǎ is a foreign student, Yǐ, a Chinese student.

Jiǎ	Qǐngwèn, Xīzàng de qíngkuàng zuìjìn zěnmeyàng?	May I ask what the situation in Tibet is like these days?
Yǐ	Tīngshuō xiànzài de jīngjì bú cuò, dànshì rénquán yǒu diǎnr wèntí.	I hear that nowadays the economy isn't bad, but there are some problems with human rights.
Jiǎ	Zhōngguó rén duì Dálài Lǎma yǒu shénme kànfǎ?	How do Chinese view the Dalai Lama?
Yǐ	Zhōngguó zhèngfǔ bù xǐhuān tā, kěshì hěn duō Xīzàng rén hěn xǐhuān tā. Měiguó rén zěnmeyàng xiǎng?	The Chinese government doesn't like him, but lots of Tibetans do like him. How do Americans feel?
Jiǎ	Yǒude Měiguó rén xiǎng Xīzàng shì yí ge guójiā, bú shì Zhōngguó de yí bùfen.	Some Americans think that Tibet is a country rather than a part of China.
Yǐ	Nǐ juéde ne?	What do you feel?
Jiǎ	Zhèi ge wèntí hěn fùzá, kěshì yěxǔ zuìhòu Xīzàng rén hái děi zìjǐ juéding.	That's a complicated question, but in the end, the Tibetans will have to decide for themselves.

Notes

qíngkuàng	N	‘situation (emotion-situation)’; also <u>qíngxíng</u> ‘situation (emotion-form)’.
-----------	---	---

Places

Xīnjiāng	[Province in the far northwest of China.]
Miǎndiàn	Burma [Myanmar]

People

Aung San Suu Kyi:	Miǎndiàn de Nuòbèi'ěr Jiǎng huòdé-zhě. Burmese DE Nobel Prize receive-er
Chén Shǔibiǎn:	Táiwān de zǒngtǒng [elected 2000, re-elected 2004]

Descriptions

hěn qióng	poor
hěn luòhòu	backwards
hěn fādá	developed
kējì hěn xiāngjìn	technologically advanced ('science-tech first-enter')

Issues

jīngjì	economics
rénquán	(people-rights)
wèishēng	hygiene; sanitation; health
jiànkāng	health; healthy
jiāotōng	transportation; communications; traffic
kōngqì	air
huánjìng	environment
wūrǎn	pollution: <u>kōngqì wūrǎn</u> ; <u>shuǐ wūrǎn</u> ; <u>huánjìng wūrǎn</u>
jiàoyù	education
qìhòu	climate (literal or metaphorical)
zhèngfǔ	government
fǔbài	corruption: <u>fǔbài de guānliáo</u> 'corrupt officials ~ bureaucrats'
rénkǒu	population
shīyè	unemployment (lose-job); cf. <u>xiàgāng</u> 'layoffs'
yǐnshí	diet (drink-food)
zhǒngzú qíshì	(race-prejudice)
wújiā kěguī	homelessness (no-home can-return)
nànmín	refugees (calamity-people); <u>bì'ànzhě</u> 'avoid-calamity-ers'
kǒngbù-zhǔyì	terrorism (terror-ism); <u>kǒngbù-fènzi</u> 'terrorists (terror-elements)'

MIT OpenCourseWare
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21G.103 Chinese III (Regular)
Fall 2005

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.