

Grammar Revision 7: Verb Constructions

1. Passive constructions

Transitive verbs without an object acquire a passive meaning (cf. grammar sheet 3). The logical object of such passive verbs is introduced by *yú* 於:

勞心者治人，勞力者治於人。治於人者食人，治人者食於人。
He who exerts his mind rules over others, while he who exerts his strength is ruled by others. The one who is ruled by others feeds others, while the one who rules over others is fed by others.

Jiàn 見 is used as a passive marker in classical Chinese:

盆成括見殺。惡人者必見惡也。
Pénchéng Kuò was killed. One who hates others will inevitably be hated.
故君子恥不修，不恥見汙；恥不信，不恥不見信。
Therefore, the superior man is ashamed of lacking cultivation, but not of being dragged through the mud; he is ashamed of not being trustworthy, but not of being not trusted.

The logical subject of such passive sentences is introduced by *yú* 於:

吾嘗三仕，三見逐於君。
I have served three times in office, and three times I have been chased away by your majesty.

Bèi 被 is still regularly used in modern Chinese as a passive marker. In classical Chinese it has the same function which is derived from its verbal meaning ‘to receive, undergo, suffer’.

信而見疑，中而被謗，能無怨呼。
If one is distrusted although being trustworthy, if one is slandered although being loyal – how could one be free from resentment?

The preposition *wèi* 爲 can mark the passive use of a verb:

臣已未辱矣。
I have already been humiliated!

止將爲三君獲。
If you stop, you will be captured by the Three Armies.

The logical subject of the action, if present, follows *wèi* 爲:

吾恐其爲天下笑。
I fear he will be laughed at by the whole world.

The passive construction with *wèi* 爲 can be modified by inserting *suǒ* 所 between the logical subject and the verb. A *wéi* 爲 B *suǒ* 所 V. then literally means “A is what B V.s”.

楚遂削弱爲秦所輕。
[The state of] Chǔ was thus cut up and weakened, and it was considered insignificant by Qín.

申徒狄諫而不聽，負石自投於河，爲魚鱉所食。
Shěntú Dí remonstrated but was not heard, so carrying a rock he threw himself into a river and was eaten by the fish and turtles.

Verbs following *kě* 可 is passive:

鼻大可小，小，不可大也。
If the nose is big, it can be made smaller, but if it is small, it cannot be enlarged.
石可破也而不可奪堅。
A stone can be smashed, but it cannot be robbed of its hardness.

2. *yǐ* 以 A *wéi* 爲 B

This construction has two meanings. It can mean “to make A into B” or “to make B from A”:

以木爲舟。 to make a boat from wood

The second, figurative meaning is “to consider A as B”:

以天爲父。 to regard Heaven as one’s father

The word following *wéi* 爲 is not always a noun, it can also be a verb or stative verb:

百姓皆以王爲愛也。
The people of the hundred clans all took Your Majesty to be stingy.

