Passives forever: control, raising and implicit arguments

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Non-canonical passives (with a semi-lexical predicate like English get, Mandarin bei, Taiwanese hoo, German kriegen/bekommen, French faire, Japanese rare, Korean –I, Vietnamese bi, etc.) have posed significant questions of analysis and interpretation, including whether they should be analyzed in terms of raising or control, how they differ from normal canonical be-passives semantically, and how the differences are to be accounted for. Recent accounts (e.g., in Alexiadou & Schäfer 2013) have converged on the points (a) that the non-canonical passives are not unitary across languages, (b) both control and raising are possible, even in the same language, depending on context and lexical choice. Although I argued in Huang (1999) for deriving the Mandarin long passive via predication (for the long passive) and control (for the short passive), in Huang (2013) it is shown that while some passive sentences continue to be best analyzed in terms of predication/control, others must be derived via raising into a non-thematic subject position, while still others may be derivationally ambiguous.

My talk will develop a further argument for the need of a raising derivation, based on the affectedness interpretation of a non-canonical passive, with respect to which argument in a given sentence denotes the Affectee. I argue that a raising bei is related to a control bei through the suppression of an Experimenter/Affectee argument, just as a passive verb is related to the active through the suppression of the Agent external argument. Suppression leads to the presence of implicit arguments (implicit agent for the main verb, implicit experiencer for bei), both existentially closed. Both the suppressed arguments may be overtly expressed (as oblique arguments, e.g. adjunct or applicative). A control bei has an overt Affectee as its thematic subject, while in a raising bei the Affectee turns implicit. This captures the fact that a Chinese passive often describes an event perceived as a misfortune, if not for the referent of its subject, then for the speaker or some other salient individual. (Thus a short passive like tangguo bei chi-guang le ‘the candies got eaten up’ involves two implicit arguments: an implicit Agent who ate the candies, and an implicit Affectee who suffers from it.) I argue that there are two sources for the existence of an Affectee argument: (a) it may arise by virtue of being an ‘outer’ object (mid-Applicative or high applicative) of the main predicate (not necessarily limited to a passive), where the height of the applicative corresponds to the degree of adversity (cf. Washio 1993), and (b) it may arise by virtue of the argument structure of bei. Languages may differ in whether they exhibit either or both types.