The Nature of the Empty Subject in Gapless *Bei* Sentences in Early Mandarin[*]

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This paper investigates a special type of *bei* construction in Early Mandarin. Both Yu (1989) and Yu and Ueda (1999) assume that such 'subjectless' and gapless *bei* sentences are not derived by eliding a referential subject NP. I will argue against this claim and propose that the empty subject may be referential or non-referential, based on statistics results obtained from several classical novels. The referential empty subject is recoverable and thus can be treated as a subtype of gapless *bei* sentences with referential subjects. The non-referential empty subject, on the other hand, is akin to the expletive subject of the impersonal passives in languages like Dutch and Welsh. I propose that *bei* in the stage of Early Mandarin acquired new features of [+Experiencer/ --Passivization] and [--Experiencer/ --Passivization, yielding the gapless passives with a referential and non-referential grammatical subject respectively.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I will investigate a special type of *bei* construction in Early Mandarin, which is labeled as the *bei* construction with zero subjects by Yu and Ueda (1999). The goal of this paper is to identify the nature of the empty subjects in this construction. Furthermore, I will also propose syntactic structures of such special *bei* sentences where the empty subjects are licensed.

2. Facts and previous analysis of gapless *bei* sentences with empty subjects in Early Mandarin

Following Jiang (1994) and Feng (2000), the period of Early Mandarin is defined as dating from Tang and Five Dynasties to Ming and Qing Dynasty. As is well-known, starting from Sui and Tang Dynasty, the *bei* construction became the dominant form of passives in

Chinese, as in (1) and (2). These canonical passives are all gapped.

(1) a.舍長官禁貴人，汝亦<u>被</u>拘斜？（晉書元帝紀）
　　b.桑落之敗，藩艦被燒（南史胡藩傳）
　　c. 這李小二先前在東京時，不合偷了店主人家財，被捉住了，要送官司問罪。
　　（水滸傳）
(2) a. 谷深而背陽，被前岩遮，日光不曾照著。（入唐求法巡禮行記卷三）
　　b. . 行至小江，遂被狂賊侵欺。（伍子胥變文）
　　c. 今日小弟陳達不聽好言，誤犯虎威，已被英雄擒捉在貴莊。（水滸傳）

However, as first observed by Wang (1958), Early Mandarin also exhibits a special type of *bei* sentences, which obviously do not behave on a par with canonical *bei* sentences. This is illustrated in (3).

(3) a. 被我咬斷繩索，到得這裡。（水滸傳）
　　b. 至神廟五里以來，泥神被北方大王唱一聲。（水滸傳）

It is necessary to note that these *bei* sentences are all gapless. According to him, one subtype (3a) could have an alternative word order with the patient NP in the subject position while the other subtype (3b) could not.

Yu (1989) and Yu and Ueda (1999) further focus on such special *bei* sentences that have no (overt) subject as illustrated in (4) and (5).

(4) a. 被月在下面遮了日 （朱子語類輯略）
　　b. 奈何緣被人識得伊 （祖堂集索引）
　　c. 被小夫人引了我魂靈 （元刊雜劇詐妮子調風月）
(5) a. 被猴行者化一團大石，在肚內漸漸會大。（大唐三藏取經詩話第六）
　　b. 二將奏曰：被漢將詐宣我王有旨。（變文：漢將王陵）

Similar to Wang (1958), they divide such *bei* sentences into those that could have an alternative word order with the patient NP being in the grammatical subject position as in (4) or those that could not as in (5). Both Yu (1989) and Yu and Ueda (1999) assume that such 'subjectless' *bei* sentences are not derived by eliding a referential subject NP.

Recast under the framework of generative grammar, Yu and Ueda's claim amounts to indicating that the empty subject in gapless *bei* sentences is not a referential empty category. I will argue against this claim and propose that the empty subject may be referential or non-referential.

3. Referential and non-referential empty subjects in gapless *bei* sentences

As Early Mandarin independently allows gapless *bei* sentences with overt surface subjects, shown in (3b) and (6), it is perfectly feasible to claim that one type of empty subject at issue is the null counterpart of a referential subject in *bei* sentences. The overt surface subjects in (6a-c) are 娘子, 那隻猛虎 and 小行者 respectively.

(6) a. 直至東京城內殿帥府前，尋到張教頭家，聞說娘子被高太尉威逼親事，自縊
身死，已故半載。(水滸傳)

　　b. 當下景陽岡上那隻猛虎，被武松沒頓飯之間，一頓拳腳，打得那大蟲動彈不得，
諫得口裏兀自氣喘。(水滸傳)

　　c. 然小行者被他作法，變做一個驢兒，吊在廳前。（大唐三藏取經詩話第五）

This claim is supported by the fact that some empty subjects at issue are interpreted as referring back to an antecedent in the preceding texts and have an anaphoric construal as illustrated in (7). The antecedents for the empty subject in (7a-c) are 兩個公人, 黃安 and 我們 respectively.

(7) a. 兩個公人聽了道：....正在途中，＿＿被魯智深要行便行，要歇便歇，那裏敢
扭他？(水滸傳九回)

　　b. 黃安把船儘力搖過蘆葦岸邊，＿＿＿卻被兩邊小港裏鑽出四五十隻小船來。（水
滸傳二十回）

　　c. 我們急把船回時，來到窄狹港口，只見岸上約有二三十人，兩頭牽一條大篾索，
橫截在水面上。卻待向前看索時，＿＿又 被 他岸上灰瓶石子，如雨點一般打
將來。(水滸傳二十回）

To facilitate discussion, this EC will also be referred to as pro, given its similarity with the syntactic distribution of the referential empty pronouns in Chinese (Wei-Tien Tsai, p.c.), though no part of the analysis in this paper depends on its precise classification.

However, are all the empty subjects referential in gapless *bei* sentences? I argue that the answer is negative; some empty subjects in gapless *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin must be non-referential. In other words, Yu and Ueda (1999) are correct in claiming the existence of a non-referencial empty subject in this special type of *bei* construction in Early Mandarin. Consider the examples with the resumptive NPs as labeled by Tang (1988) in (8). The so-called resumptive NPs illustrated in (8a-c) are 這廝, 常氏 and 阿
里罕 respectively.

(8) a. 教授不知，這廝夜來赤條條地睡在靈官廟裏， ＿＿被我們拿了這廝，帶
到晁保正莊上。(水滸傳)

b. 常氏將飯食送往田間，＿＿在中路忽被大風將<u>常氏</u>吹過隔岸龍歸村（新編五代史平話）

c. 阿里罕…..郭威待至二更後，＿＿被郭威將<u>阿里罕</u>殺了。（新編五代史平話）

Take (8a) as an example: the most felicitous referent of the empty subject is這廝 'this guy' from the preceding discourse. This construal, however, would induce a Binding Principle C violation because the NP 'this guy' occurs after *bei* in the same sentence and would be bound by the co-referential empty subject.

The existence of a non-referential empty subject in the construction at issue is further supported by statistics results from several classical novels. As shown in Table 1, the percentage of empty subjects in gapless *bei* sentences is much higher than that in canonical, gapped *bei* sentences, whether the gapped *bei* sentences have an overt logical subject or not.

Table 1 Frequency and ratio of the empty subject in *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin

	水滸傳 (1-40 回)	西遊記 (1-50 回)	金瓶梅 (1-20 回)	紅樓夢 (1-40 回)
Gapped-Short	17 / 28 (61%)	1 / 1 (100%)	3 / 4 (75%)	0 / 4 (0%)
Gapped-Long	103 / 143 (72%)	38 / 68 (57%)	43 / 59 (73%)	29 / 43 (67%)
Gapless	43 / 49 (88%)	15 / 17 (88%)	14 / 15 (93%)	3 / 3 (100%)

Assuming that the frequency of dropping a recoverable grammatical subject due to pragmatic or discourse factors is the same in both gapped and gapless *bei* sentences, then the higher percentage of an empty subject in gapless *bei* sentences than in gapped *bei* sentences suggests that not all empty subjects in gapless *bei* sentences are recoverable and that some of them must be base-generated as a non-referential EC. I thus conclude that in addition to a referential pro subject, gapless *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin could also have a non-referential empty subject.

4. Structures of gapless *bei* sentences where the empty subjects are licensed

I shall now turn to the syntactic structures where the empty subjects of gapless *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin are licensed. Since *bei* sentences are productive in Modern Chinese, it is instructive to first consider the analysis of the *bei* constructions in Modern Chinese. I assume a non-unified analysis of the *bei* sentences in Modern Chinese as proposed by Ting (1998) and Huang (1999). Under this approach, long *bei* sentences involve an A'-chain as in (9) whereas short *bei* sentences involve A movement as in (10).

(9) Long passives: A'-chain

    a. 張三$_i$ [$_{VP}$ 被 [$_{IP}$ Op$_i$ [$_{IP}$ 李四批評了 t_i]]

    b. 張三$_i$ [$_{VP}$ 被 [$_{IP}$ Op $_i$ [$_{IP}$ 李四批評了 他$_i$一頓]]

    c. The book$_i$ is tough [OP$_i$ PRO to read t_i]

    d. The book$_i$ is too long [OP$_i$ PRO to read t_i]

    e. The book$_i$ is too long [OP$_i$ PRO to read it$_i$]

(10) Short passives: A movement

    a. 張三$_i$ [$_{VP}$ 被 [PRO$_i$ 批評了 t_i]]

    b. *Get* passives in English: Hoshi (1994)

        John$_i$ [$_{VP}$ got [PRO$_i$ hit t_i]]

In both long and short *bei* sentences in Modern Chinese, the surface subject position is claimed to be a theta position and *bei* assigns an external theta role to the surface subject NP, given the possible occurrence of a subject-oriented adverb like 'deliberately' in *bei* sentences as in (11).

(11) 張三故意被(李四)批評了

(12) a. *John was hit on purpose.

    b. John got hit on purpose.

However, I claim that the *bei* sentences in Modern Chinese should not always have a theta subject, as evidenced by the fact that idiom chunks may serve as the surface subject of the *bei* sentence as observed by Li (1990) in examples like (13).

(13) a. 這個刀被他開壞了

    b. 這個默被他幽壞了

      (Li 1990, 165)

(14) a. The hatchet is hard to bury after long years of war. (Berman 1973, Goh 2000, Hicks 2009)

    b. The hatchet was buried after long years of war.

I propose that in addition to being base-generated, the surface subject of *bei* sentences in Modern Chinese can also be derived by movement and can be in a non-theta position, as shown in (15a) and (15b). In (15a), long passives in Modern Chinese are derived by null operator movement on a par with the derivation of the tough constructions as proposed by Hicks (2009). In (15b), short passives in Modern Chinese are derived by A movement as proposed by Ting (1995).

(15) a. Long passive in Modern Chinese

張三$_i$ [$_{VP}$被 [$_{IP}$ [Op t$_i$] $_k$ [$_{IP}$ 李四批評了 t$_k$]]

(cf. Hicks' 2009 analysis of the *tough* construction)

b. Short passive in Modern Chinese

張三$_i$ [$_{VP}$被 [$_{VP}$ 批評了 t$_i$]] (Ting 1995)

Although not all *bei* sentences in Modern Chinese involve external theta role suppression and accusative Case absorption as in English-type passives, they are construed as passives by Chinese speakers because, according to Huang (1999), they exhibit properties of passivization, such as intransitivization, argument promotion and a missing NP position in the predicate coindexed with the subject as in (16).

(16) properties of passivization under a universal notion of passives (Huang 1999)

a. intransitivization

b. argument promotion

c. a missing NP position in the predicate coindexed with the subject

This analysis of gapped *bei* sentences in Modern Chinese can be directly carried over to gapped *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin. On the other hand, regarding gapless *bei* sentences with a referential subject in Early Mandarin, I propose that they have structures as in (17).

(17) a. [娘子[$_{VP}$ 被 [$_{IP}$ 高太尉威逼親事]]] ，自縊身死，已故半載。

b. 我們$_i$ 急把船回時，….. 卻待向前看索時，[pro$_i$ 又 [$_{VP}$ 被 [$_{IP}$ 他岸上灰瓶石子，如雨點一般打將來]]。

In gapless *bei* sentences with a referential subject in Early Mandarin, *bei* is an ECM-type of verb, assigning Case to the logical subject and assigning an external theta role to the surface subject. The surface subject can be overt or non-overt. The embedded verb can assign an external theta role and accusative Case. No gap is created in such *bei* sentences. In other words, *bei* does not trigger passivization in any form, not even in the Chinese style.

Regarding gapless *bei* sentences with a non-referential subject, I propose that they have a structure as in (18).

(18) [pro$_{expl}$ [$_{VP}$ 被 [$_{IP}$ 我們拿了這廝]]]

The empty subject is analogous to the expletive subject in impersonal passives that are found in languages like German, Dutch, Welsh, Norwegian and Hebrew as illustrated in (19).

(19) a. Dutch (Kitagawa 1997)

      Er   weid   eer   boek   gelezen   door   Karel

      there   was   a   book   read   by   Karel

      'A book was read by Karel.'

    b. Welsh (Perlmutter and Postal 1984)

      Lladdwyd   dyn   (gam   ddraig)

      kill-pass   man   by   dragon

      'A man was killed (by a dragon).'

Bei, as an ECM-type of verb, assigns Case to the logical subject, but crucially it does not assign an external theta role to the surface subject. As in gapless *bei* sentences with a referential subject we have seen, there is no gap created in the predicate and *bei* does not trigger passivization in any form.

    One may wonder about the function of the gapless *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin. As is well-noted in the literature (Yu and Ueda 1999, Jiang 1994), an important function of gapless *bei* sentences is to create discourse coherence. I propose that those with a referential subject have this function. As illustrated in (20a), with the use of a gapless *bei* construction, the discourse topic would remain on the NP 小人 *xiaoren* 'I' . In contrast, if a canonical gapped *bei* construction is used as in (20b), the discourse topic would shift to the NP 相公的馬 *xianggong de ma* 'your horse'.

(20) a. 酒保道：「小人起來上草，只見籬笆推翻，＿＿＿*被人將相公的馬偷將去了。*」
     （水滸傳五十三回）

    b. 酒保道：「小人起來上草，只見籬笆推翻，*相公的馬被人偷將去了。*」

On the other hand, I propose that those with a non-referential subject have a construal analogous to "impersonal passives" in other languages. In such passives, the prominence of the activity is particularly enhanced (Blevens 2006). Since none of the participants is focused, the event is characterized by low salience (Sanso 2006). With a function of serving as backgrounding clauses, this account explains why *bei* in gapless *bei* sentences is often construed as meaning 'because' (cf. Yu and Ueda 1999), as illustrated in (21).

(21) a. 今日被你不長進，敗得一個也沒了。（警世通言卷四十）

    b. 太公道：「老漢止有這個小女，如今方得一十九歲。被此間有座山，喚做桃花山，近來山上有兩個大王…..見了老漢女兒…..選著今夜好日…..因此煩惱，非是爭師父一個人。」（水滸傳五回）

    c. 近來被這個營內張團練，新從東路州來，帶一人到此。那廝姓蔣名忠…..（水滸傳二十九回）

Interestingly, the two characteristics of gapless passives in Early Mandarin, namely that *bei* does not assign an external theta role to the surface subject and does not trigger passivization in any form, would make such *bei* sentences a type of passive that is claimed not to exist by Hoshi (1994).

Table 2 Features of –*rare* and the resulting passives in Japanese

	+Exp	-- Exp
+Pass	*ni* direct passives	*ni yotte* passives
--Pass	*ni* indirect passives	**Non-existent**

As indicated in Table 2, the Japanese passive morpheme -*rare* may have features [+/--Experiencer] and [+/--Passivization]. Although the feature combinations yield three types of Japanese passives, the fourth type with [-- Experiencer/ -Passivization] *rare* is claimed not to exist "because of the Principle of Morphological Nonredundancy, which prohibits a passive verb with no positive feature from surfacing." (Hoshi 1994, 161)

In gapless *bei* sentences with a non-referential subject, *bei* assigns a theta role to its surface subject but does not trigger passivization. This is exactly the type of passives that is expected to be ruled out by Zubizarreta's (1985) Principle of Morphological Nonredundancy if Hoshi's account is correct. Therefore, I conclude that the absence of the fourth type of passives in Modern Japanese may simply be an accidental gap.

Along the lines of Hoshi (1994), I propose that gapped and gapless *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin are derived by *bei* with different feature specifications as indicated in (22) and (23) respectively.

(22) Gapped *bei* sentences
    bei: [+Experiencer/ + Passivization]
    bei: [--Experiencer/ + Passivization]
(23) Gapless *bei* sentences
    bei: [+Experiencer/ --Passivization]
    bei: [--Experiencer/ --Passivization]

Gapped *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin are derived by *bei* with [+Experiencer/ + Passivization] and *bei* with [--Experiencer/ + Passivization]. Gapless *bei* sentences, on the other hand, are derived by *bei* with [+Experiencer/ --Passivization] and *bei* with [--Experiencer/ --Passivization].

On this analysis, the emergence of gapless *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin is attributed to *bei* acquiring new lexical features at this stage. Therefore this fact should not

be characterized as *bei* being "grammaticalized" as claimed by Yu and Ueda (1999) but rather as *bei* undergoing a change of acquiring different lexical properties (cf. Roberts 2007).

5. Concluding remarks

Kitagawa (1997) (cf. Hoshi 1994) proposes that to pursue a universal characterization of passives, selectional properties of passive morphemes should be considered. Facts of *bei* sentences in Early Mandarin provide further support for this approach that makes special reference to the passive morpheme's selectional properties. Noteworthy is that the type of *bei* sentences with a non-referential empty subject fills in the gap of Hoshi's (1994) system of passivization in the sense that they provide evidence for the existence of a type of passives in the universal grammar that are claimed not to exist.

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