

UNIT TWO

The 被 **bèi** structure

A The 被 **bèi** structure in Chinese is similar to the passive voice in English. However, English passive voice sentences are commonly rendered in Chinese as topic–comment sentences. (For further discussion of topic–comment structures, see Unit 7.):

菜吃完了。 **cài chī wán le**
The food has been eaten.

教室打扫干净了。 **jiàoshì dǎsǎo gānjìng le**
The classroom has been swept clean.

Note: As a general rule, verbs followed by complements of result (e.g. 吃 **chī** 'eat' + 完 **wán** 'to a finish', 打扫 **dǎsǎo** 'sweep' + 干净 **gānjìng** 'till clean', etc.) tend to be associated with the sentence particle 了 **le**. (See Units 1 and 8.)

The 被 **bèi** structure comes into play (1) when an 'agent' is introduced into the sentence or (2) the speaker adopts a narrative stance and describes how something has happened:

(1) 被 **bèi** with an agent:

菜被我吃完了。 **cài bèi wǒ chī wán le**
The food was finished by me. (我 **wǒ** – the 'agent')

教室被学生们打扫干净了。 **jiàoshì bèi xuéshengmen dǎsǎo gānjìng le**
The classroom was swept clean by the students. (学生 **xuésheng** – the 'agent')

(2) 被 **bèi** in a narrative sentence:

菜被吃完了。 **cài bèi chī wán le**
The food was eaten (by someone).

教室被打扫干净了。 **jiàoshì bèi dǎsǎo gānjìng le**
The classroom was swept clean (by someone).

Note: In the sentence 菜吃完了 **cài chī wán le**, the speaker takes a commentative stance, observing that the food has been finished and there is none left. By contrast, in the sentence 菜被吃完了 **cài bèi chī wán le**, the speaker adopts a narrative stance, and is saying what has happened to the food, i.e. it has been eaten by somebody.

B The verb in a 被 **bèi** sentence, as in a 把 **bǎ** sentence (see Unit 1), should always be followed by a complement:

电视机被弟弟弄坏了。

diànshìjī bèi dìdì nòng huài le (坏 **huài** result complement)

The TV set was damaged by (my) younger brother.

窗户都被打开了。 **chuānghu dōu bèi dǎ kāi le** (开 **kāi** result complement)

All the windows had been opened.

钱被藏在抽屉里。

qián bèi cáng zài chōuti li (在...里 **zài... li** location complement)

The money was kept in a drawer.

小猫被爸爸抱在怀里。

xiǎo māo bèi bàba bào zài huái li (在...里 **zài... li** location complement)

Father held the kitten in his arms. (*lit.* The kitten was held in his arms by Father.)

礼物被装进一个漂亮的盒子里去了。

lǐwù bèi zhuāng jìn yī gè piàoliang de hézi li qù le (进...去 **jìn... qù** direction complement)

The gift was put into an attractive box.

狼被赶出村子去。

láng bèi gǎn chū cūnzi qù (出...去 **chū... qù** direction complement)

The wolf was driven away from the village.

她被爸爸批评了几次。

tā bèi bàba pīpíng le jǐ cì (几次 **jǐ cì** frequency complement)

She was reprimanded several times by her father.

犯人被关了三年。

fàn rén bèi guān le sān nián (三年 **sān nián** duration complement)

The criminal was imprisoned for three years.

这种画儿被叫作现代画。

zhè/zhèi zhǒng huàr bèi jiào zuò xiàndài huà (作 **zuò** ... as complement)
This style of painting is called Modern Art.

这个骗了被我当成好人。

zhè/zhèi gè piànzi bèi wǒ dāng chéng hǎo rén (成 **chéng** ... as complement)
This cheat was taken by me to be an honest person.

头发被剪得太短了。

tóufa bèi jiǎn de tài duǎn le (manner/resultant state 得 **de** phrase as complement)
His/her hair was (cut) too short.

她被雨淋得衣服都湿透了。

tā bèi yǔ lín de yīfu dōu shī tòu le (得 **de** clause as complement)
She was soaked to the skin by the rain.

(*lit.* She was drenched so much by the rain that her clothes were all soaked.)

Note: It can be seen from the last two examples that adjectival complements modified by degree adverbs 太 **tài** 'too' or degree complement 透 **tòu** 'through and through', etc. generally require the use of sentence particle 了 **le**.

C In spoken Chinese or in colloquial writing, 被 **bèi** is often replaced by 让 **ràng** or 叫 **jiào**, but only if an agent is involved. In these cases 给 **gěi** may also be used directly before the verb:

衣服让孩子 (给) 弄脏了。 **yīfu ràng hái zi (gěi) nòng zāng le**
The child made his/her clothes dirty.

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ebruary 强盗叫警察 (给) 抓住了。 **qiángdào jiào jǐngchá (gěi) zhuā zhù le**
The robber was arrested by the police.

Note that 被 **bèi** does not usually go with 给 **gěi**:

One does not say:

*强盗被警察 (给) 抓住了。

qiángdào bèi jǐngchá (gěi) zhuā zhù le to translate 'The robber was arrested by the police'.

In addition, in colloquial speech, 给 **gěi** itself may be used to replace 被 **bèi** in sentences where the agent is not specified:

强盗给抓住了。 **qiángdào gěi zhuā zhù le**

The robber was caught.

D It should also be noted that the 被 **bèi** structure is often used to narrate an unpleasant event:

他被爸爸骂了一顿。 **tā bèi bàba mà le yī dùn**
He was told off by his father.

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她让老师批评得哭了起来。 **tā ràng lǎoshī pīpíng de kū le qīlái**
She was criticised so much by the teacher that she began to cry.

花瓶叫小吴(给)打破了。 **huāpíng jiào xiǎo wú (gěi) dǎ pò le**
The vase was broken by Xiao Wu.

E The 被 **bèi** construction, being a narrative sentence about something that has happened, is always negated by 没(有) **méi(yǒu)**, which is placed immediately before 被 **bèi**. In a negative 被 **bèi** sentence, 了 **le**, of course, is not present after the complement:

衣服没(有)被雨淋湿。 **yīfu méi(yǒu) bèi yǔ lín shī**
The clothes were not (made) wet by the rain.

小女孩没(有)被火烧伤。 **xiǎo nǚhái méi(yǒu) bèi huǒ shāo shāng**
The little girl was not burnt by the fire.

F Adverbials of manner or location in 被 **bèi** sentences may precede either 被 **bèi** or the verb. In the latter case, the adverbial becomes more emphatic:

月亮慢慢地被一片乌云遮住了。
yuèliang màn màn de bèi yī piàn wūyún zhē zhù le
The moon was slowly covered by a patch of black clouds.

那些调皮的孩子让校长(给)狠狠地批评了一顿。
nà/nèi xiē tiáopí de háizi ràng xiàozhǎng (gěi) hěn hěn de pīpíng le yī dùn
Those naughty children were severely criticised by the head teacher.

小女孩被消防队员从屋子里救了出来。
xiǎo nǚhái bèi xiāofáng duìyuán cóng wūzi li jiù le chūlái
The little girl was rescued from the house by the firemen.

Note 1: However, monosyllabic referential adverbs like 都 **dōu** 'all', 'both', 就 **jiù** 'then', 'soon', 才 **cái** 'only', 'then', etc. must always precede 被 **bèi**:

剩下的饭菜都被(厨师)倒掉了。
shèng xià de fāncài dōu bèi (chúshī) dào diào le
All the food that was left over was thrown away (by the cook).

Note 2: A number of examples given in this unit show that complements of direction, frequency and duration can in a narrative tone follow verbs marked by the aspect marker 了 **le** (e.g. 哭了起来 **kū le qīlái** 'started to cry'/'weep', 救了出来 **jiù le chūlái** 'be rescued from (the house)', 骂了一顿 **mà le yī dùn** 'told (somebody) off severely', 批评了几次 **pīpíng le jǐ cì** 'reprimanded several times', 关了三年 **guān le sān nián** 'imprisoned for three years'). However, verbs taking complements of result cannot be interrupted by the aspect marker 了 **le**, which has to come after the complement. In this situation it therefore often coincides with the sentence particle 了 **le** at the end of the sentence (e.g. 打破了 **dǎ pò le** 'be broken', 倒掉了 **dào diào le** 'be thrown away', etc.).

Exercise 2.1

Rewrite the following Chinese sentences using the 被 *bèi* structure:

- 1 小孩儿把窗户打破了。 **xiǎoháir bǎ chuānghu dǎ pò le**
The child broke the window.
- 2 她从银行里把钱取了出来。 **tā cóng yínháng li bǎ qián qǔ le chūlái**
She took the money out of the bank.
- 3 警察当场把小偷抓住了。 **jǐngchá dāngchǎng bǎ xiǎotou zhuā zhù le**
The police caught the thief on the spot.
- 4 司机把汽车修好了。 **sījī bǎ qìchē xiū hǎo le**
The driver mended the car.
- 5 厨师把鸡烤熟了。 **chúshī bǎ jī kǎo shú/shóu le**
The cook roasted the chicken.
- 6 理发师把他的头发剪得太短了。 **lǐfāshī bǎ tā de tóufa jiǎn de tài duǎn le**
The barber cut his hair too short.

Exercise 2.2

Form 被 *bèi* sentences using the words and phrases given below and then translate the sentences into English:

- 1 她 **tā** 吃了 **chī le** 那个苹果 **nà/nèi gè píngguǒ**
- 2 我 **wǒ** 钥匙 **yàoshi** 找到了 **zhǎo dào le**
- 3 批评了 **pīpíng le** 我女儿 **wǒ nǚ'ér** 老师 **lǎoshī** 一顿 **yī dùn**
- 4 他 **tā** 撞倒了 **zhuàng dǎo le** 卡车 **kǎchē**
- 5 老板 **lǎobǎn** 撤了职 **chè le zhí** 工人 **gōngrén**
- 6 小偷 **xiǎotou** 监狱 **jiānyù** 关进 **guān jìn**

Exercise 2.3

There are mistakes in all the Chinese sentences below. Supply the correct version in each case:

- 1 我要的书被人借。 **wǒ yào de shū bèi rén jiè**
The book I wanted has been borrowed by someone else.
- 2 蛋糕叫小李吃。 **dàngāo jiào xiǎo lǐ chī**
The cake was eaten by Xiao Li.
- 3 大家被她说得笑。 **dàjiā bèi tā shuō de xiào**
She made everybody laugh with what she said.
- 4 老鼠让猫给逮。 **lǎoshǔ ràng māo gěi dǎi**
The mouse was caught by the cat.

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- 5 她叫自行车给撞。 **tā jiào zìxíngchē gěi zhuàng**
She was knocked over by a bike.
- 6 这个计划大家给取消了。 **zhè/zhèi gè jìhuà dàjiā gěi qǔxiāo le**
Everyone decided we should cancel this plan. (*lit.* This plan was cancelled by everyone.)
- 7 她被孙老师当自己的女儿。 **tā bèi sūn lǎoshī dàng zìjǐ de nǚ'ér**
She was treated by Sun the teacher as his/her own daughter.
- 8 这个问题被老师解释。 **zhè/zhèi gè wèntí bèi lǎoshī jiěshì**
The problem was explained very clearly by the teacher.
- 9 花儿被插花瓶里了。 **huār bèi chā huāpíng li le**
The flowers were put in a vase.
- 10 行李都让火车给运。 **xínglǐ dōu ràng huǒchē gěi yùn**
The luggage was all taken by train.

Exercise 2.4

Translate the following into Chinese, using the 被 **bèi** structure:

- 1 Our supper was eaten by the cat.
- 2 The keys were forgotten by the driver.
- 3 I was told off by the teacher.
- 4 The child was knocked down by a bus.
- 5 I was treated by him like his own son.
- 6 The door was kicked open by the police.
- 7 The bicycle was damaged by the thief.
- 8 Her book was hidden behind the cupboard.
- 9 The fence was blown over by the wind.
- 10 I was made so angry by him that I could not speak. (气 **qì** 'make angry')