

1 Contrastive Study of Passive Voice of Intransitive Verbs in 2 English and German -based on theConstrual Theory

3 Ying Yang¹

4 ¹ Northwestern Polytechnical University

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7 **Abstract**

8 English and German have not only similarities but also differences in many ways. From the
9 perspective of cognitive linguistics, either in English or German, the passive voice of
10 intransitive verbs is a special language phenomenon. The Construal Theory of Langacker's
11 cognitive grammar will be used to contrast and analyse the differences and cognitive reasons
12 for the passive voice of intransitive verbs in English and German from different dimensions of
13 construal. The purpose of this analysis and the contrastive outcome is to help trilingual
14 learners comprehensively and profoundly understand the two languages.

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16 **Index terms**— construal theory; intransitive verbs; passive voice; contrastive.

17 English and German have many similarities and differences, which makes students draw comparison
18 between German and English. Especially for English and German bilingual learners, because of the impact of
19 language migration they inevitably have confusion when they are learning English and German.

20 Contrastive learning is an important method of language learning, which studies the synchronicity of two or
21 more languages, and describes their similarities and differences, especially the differences (Xu Yulong 2010: 3).
22 This method is of great benefit to the teaching or the learning of students. The passive sentences in the language
23 have always been valued by grammar scholars. So this paper intends to analyze and explain the differences
24 between the passive voice of intransitive verbs in English and German by means of Langacker's construal theory
25 and the reasons of these differences, which helps the trilingual learners study comprehensively and profoundly.

26 **1 II.**

27 **2 Construal Theory**

28 "Construal" is the relationship between the speaker (or the listener) and the conceptualized and depictive scenario
29 ??Langacker 1987: 487-488). The meaning of a language is not just the content of what it triggers, but also
30 how the content is understood ??Langacker 2008: 55). Langacker devided the construal into four dimensions:
31 specificity, salience, focus and perspective.

32 Specificity refers to the level of detail described in the entity (Wu Xiaofang 2011: 58). It is also the degree
33 of descriptive sophistication of the same scene or event, with macroscopic and microscopic description. Salience
34 refers to the fact that the contents highlighted in language expressions are different. Some highlights the process
35 while other highlights the result. Langacker (2008) discusses the salience from two aspects: the profile and the
36 trajector / landmark. Both the trajector and the landmark can distinguish the differences of participants' status
37 in the highlighted relationship of profile. The focus is expressed in the language through a cognitive structure
38 "graphics / background" or "trajector / landmark". From the four specific dimensions of construal, there are
39 different representations in Chinese and English. ??Langacker (1987) thinks that perspective has two main aspects,
40 namely, viewpoint and focus. Perspective is the different language expressions produced by different observation
41 angles in the process of scene construal. It is hidden in the semantic concept in many cases and is reflected
42 through the semantic concept of expression by an overall analysis. In translation, the translator's understanding

12 THE POWER HAS BEEN GIVEN UP (BY THE POLITICIAN) VOLUNTARILY.(VERB WITH AN ADVERB)

43 of the scene expressed in the original text will vary in degree, prominence and perspective in the process of
44 construal.

45 3 III.

46 4 Research Design a) Research Question

47 What are the similarities and differences between passive voices of English and German intransitive verbs from
48 the perspective of four dimensions of Constral Theory?

49 5 b) Research Subject

50 The author choose typical English and German unmarked and marked passive sentences of intransitive verbs
51 from some grammatical books.

52 6 c) Research Procedure

53 In this study qualitative analysis is made. To be specific, in the process of analysis two aspects of passive voices
54 in English and German intransitive verbs will be included, namely, marked and unmarked passive sentences. The
55 results from the analysis of unmarked and marked passive voices in English and German intransitive verbs are
56 used to answer the research question.

57 IV.

58 7 Findings and Discussions

59 "Generally speaking, only transitive verbs have passive voices in English and German. However, some intransitive
60 verbs have their own passive voices. The most representative passive voice is the impersonal passive in
61 German (unperpönliches Passiv) and the English phrasal verb-passive"(Li Dongliang 2013: 159). Therefore,
62 two representative languages the impersonal passive voice in German and the English phrasal verbpassive in
63 this part will be analyzed. Then the similarities and differences between passive voices of English and German
64 intransitive verbs from the perspective of four dimensions of Constral Theory will be given.

65 8 a) Marked passive sentence

66 Whether English active sentence or passive sentence has its subject acting as the trajector. There is impersonal
67 passive sentence in German, that is, when the subject of the passive sentence in German is omitted, the whole
68 sentence can exist independently and its' meaning is not affected. Therefore, in this part the marked passive
69 sentence analysis is only for impersonal passive sentence in German.

70 The impersonal passive sentence in German can have complement with three case or two case and adverbial
71 and also can be without complement ??Duden 2006: 552). E.g: 1. Hier wird nicht (von den Menschen) gefischt.
72 =Fishing is not allowed here.

73 9 An der forschung der Grammatik wird (von den

74 Grammatikern)gearbeitet. =The grammarian commit to the grammar study.

75 10 Ihm wurde damals viel (von dem Lehrer) geholfen.

76 =The teacher helped him a lot. The agentive phrase of the impersonal passive sentence in German is usually
77 omitted, which leads a lower specificity than that of their active sentences.

78 There is no subject acting as the trajector in the sentence (1). "Hier" is a place adverb and cannot act as a
79 landmark. At this time, the salience of the landmark is significantly improved. The sentence (2) also lacks the
80 subject acting as the trajector. But the three case object "der Forschung der Grammatik" und "der Grammatiker"
81 at this time are regarded as the landmarks.

82 11 b) Passive Sentences of English Phrasal Verbs

83 There are four types of passive phrases in English: verbs with prepositions, verbs with adverbs, verbs with nouns
84 and prepositions, verbs with adverbs and prepositions. E.g:

85 12 The power has been given up (by the politician) voluntar- 86 ily.(Verb with an adverb)

87 2. The children are taken good care of (by the nurse) (Verb with noun and preposition)

88 **13 He is depended on (by someone).(Verb with preposition) 4.**
89 **Women were looked down upon (by many people) in the**
90 **past.(Verb with adverb and preposition)**

91 First, after the supplement of agentive phrases, which is led by the preposition "by". the meaning of the four
92 sentences is complete. The semantic concept of the English intransitive verbs' passive sentences is consistent with
93 that of their corresponding active sentences, and the specificity is also the same. However, English sometimes
94 omittes the agentive phrases, so the specificity will be changed. It can be seen from the above four sentences
95 that the specificity of semantic concept in the sentence (3) and sentence (??) is lower than that in the sentence
96 (1) and (??), and also the specificity of sentence (3) is higher than that of sentence (4). The specificities of
97 "someone" and "many people" are lower than that of "politician" and "nurse".

98 The author uses Langacker's construal theory to analyze the passive voices of English intransitive verbs, and
99 hier combines salience with focus to analyze them together. The words "power", "politician" and the relationship-
100 "give up" are the foreground of the semantic concept in the sentence (1); the foreground of sentence(2) includes
101 "children", "nurse" and the relationship—"take care of"; in the sentence(3) the words "he", "someone" and the
102 relationship—"depend on" are placed in the foreground; "women", "many people" and the relationship—"look
103 down upon" of sentence(4) are also the foreground. It can be seen from the perspective of the foreground and
104 background of the selected conceptual content that the four passive sentences and their corresponding active
105 sentence is the same. But the focus of the active sentences and passive sentences is different.

106 Because all the four sentences have their own trajector, which is the main focus "the power"(1), "the children"
107 (2), "He" (3) and "Women" (4); and also have their own landmark, which is the subordinate focus "politician"(1),
108 "nurse" (2), "someone" (3) and "many people" (4). The semantic concept expressed by the variant of English
109 phrasal verb-passive not only maintains consistency in the foreground and background of the focus dimension,
110 but also presents a process, which weakens the "agent" and strengthens "recipient" and highlights the process of
111 the relationship itself. From the point of view of perspective, the English phrasal verb always has its' subject in
112 the linear structure of passive sentences, and the concept of the relationship is complete.

113 Only the speaker chooses different viewpoint and focus. It also just reflects the subjectivity of the perspective
114 in the construal theory.

115 **14 Year 2018 c) Unmarked passive sentences in German**

116 In view of the fact that German impersonal passive voices are special, in order to easily understand, so in this
117 part the author also discusses the unmarked active voices and passive voices. Sentence(??) and (??) are the
118 two passive forms of the sentence (5). From the perspective of conceptual representation, the sentences (??) and
119 (??) all relate to the relationship—"schaffen", the participants—"Student" and "Hausaufgabe". The specificities
120 of two sentences are the same. The sentence (7) omittes the participant—"Student", compared to sentence (??)
121 and sentence (6) the specificity of this sentence is much lower. The sentences (??) and (??) use passive voice,
122 so their perspectives are consistent. However, the perspective of sentence and sentence (??) is opposite to that
123 of sentence (5). The sentence (??) is from the perspective of the agent, while the sentence (6) and sentence (7)
124 are from the perspective of the recipient.

125 **15 Der Student schuf die**

126 From the point of view of the focus, there are two participants "Student" and "Hausaufgabe" and the relationship—
127 "schaffen" in the sentence (5) and sentence (6), so the conceptual content of the foreground is consistent. In
128 the sentence (7), the participant "Student" does not appear in conceptual content of the foreground. From the
129 perspective of trajector/landmark of salience, "Student" is the subject of the sentence (5) and the trajector,
130 which is the main focus in the relationship of profile. And "Hausaufgabe" is the object of the sentence (5) and
131 the landmark, which is the subordinate focus in the relationship of profile. "Hausaufgabe" is the subject in the
132 sentence (6), and "Student" is used as the dativ object in the agentive phrase. At this time, their relations between
133 main and secondary focus (trajector and landmark) are transformed. In the sentence (7) the agentive phrase is
134 directly omitted. "Hausaufgabe" at this time is viewed as a trajector and the only focus in the relationship of
135 profile. Compared with the sentence (6) sentence (7) has a better highlighting effect.

136 The sentence (5), sentence (??) and (??) are different in specificity, focus, salience and perspective. And
137 they are used in different contexts and serve different communication purposes. Such language phenomenon is
138 in line with the commonality of human's construal.

139 **16 d) Marked passive sentences i. Impersonal passive sentence
140 in German**

141 The impersonal passive sentence in German has not the subject acting as the trajector. The sentence(10) identifies
142 this. The three case object "Ihm" serves as the landmark. The agent subject "Lehrer" is also a landmark, but its
143 salient degree is not as important as the main landmark "Ihm", so then "Lehrer" acts as the secondary landmark.
144 The sentence (10) lacks of subject, so there is no trajector, which is viewed as the main focus.

145 From the unmarked passive sentences to the marked passive sentences the analysis of passive voices in
146 German shows a process of gradual change, which is changing from weakening the "agent" and strengthening the
147 "recipient" to weakening the "agent" and weakening the "recipient", and even omitting both the "agent" and the
148 "recipient" and only highlighting the relationship itself.

149 Finally, from the standpoint of perspective dimension in the construal theory, it can be seen that the impersonal
150 passive voice in German, although its' passive voice lacks of subject in the linear structure of sentence, does not
151 affect the understanding of the relationship. But the passive voice of German verbs, which lacks of subject and
152 other components, can indirectly reflect the perspective behind the expression. The form that the impersonal
153 passive voice in German, which is a special grammatical phenomenon, regards the intransitive relationship as the
154 transitive relationship, presents a kind of clear subjective color and shows the perspective of subjectivity.

155 V.

156 17 Conclusion

157 In this paper, the author uses the four analytical dimensions of construal theory in Langacker's cognitive grammar
158 to explore the English phrasal verb-passive and the impersonal passive voice in German. By interpreting the
159 respective characteristics, the following results are obtained: Firstly, the passive voices of English and German
160 intransitive verbs are presented in the same specificity. Both of them can provide more forms of content expression
161 to the speaker or user. Secondly, from the perspective of salience and focus, the English phrasal verb-passive voice
162 maintains consistency in the foreground and background of the focus dimension, and in the salience dimension it
163 also presents a form, which weakens the "agent" and strengthens the "recipient". The characteristics of German
164 impersonal passive voice are consistent with that of English phrasal verb in the focus dimension. However,
165 compared with the English phrasal verb-passive, it shows a richer choice in the salience dimension and a gradual
166 salient process, which changes from weakening the "agent" and strengthening the "recipient" to weakening the
167 "agent" and the "recipient", and even omitting the "agent" and the "recipient". Finally, the passive voice of
168 English and German intransitive verbs both represent the perspective of subjectivity of speakers or users in the
169 perspective dimension.

170 The language shows our entire mental activity from the subjective behavior (Borsche 1990: 141). Through
171 the passive voices of English and German intransitive verbs, which are a kind of special linguistic facts in their
172 languages, we can glimpse the unique cognitive patterns of the nations behind these linguistic phenomena. By
173 contrasting the passive voices of English and German intransitive verbs the confusion of the learners who learn
174 English and German at the same time can be eliminated, as they use such passive voices. In addition, it can
175 also enrich the means of the language users' expressions and serve language communication more flexibly and
176 diversely.

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