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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IMPERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES[1,2]

***Abstract**: The research aims at providing a comparative study of the impersonal constructions (NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP) by using data from Chinese, English, Hungarian, Burmese and Persian and analyzing the constructions from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. A typological approach is used for the cross-linguistic study. Results show that when translating the impersonal constructions from Chinese into the other four languages, the construction can be best corresponded to Hungarian and Burmese. However, the English and Persian equivalents of the certain Chinese impersonals are in the passive voice. I conclude that grammatical structures are closely related to the speakers' perception of the world, which might explain the similarities between languages within different genealogical background.*

***Key words**: impersonal constructions, locative constructions, word order*

UNE ÉTUDE COMPARATIVE DES CONSTRUCTIONS IMPERSONNELLES DANS DIFFÉRENTES LANGUES

***Résumé**: Cette étude vise à étudier de façon comparative les constructions impersonnelles (NPLOC ^ VP ^ NP) à travers l'utilisation des données chinoises, anglaises, hongroises, birmanes et persanes et l'analyse des constructions du point de vue de la linguistique cognitive. En ce qui concerne l'étude interlinguistique, on adopte une approche typologique. D'après les résultats de l'étude, les constructions peuvent être mieux adaptées au hongrois et au birman lors de la traduction des constructions impersonnelles du chinois vers les quatre autres langues. Toutefois, les équivalents anglais et persan de certains impersonnels chinois sont à la voix passive. J'en tire la conclusion que les structures grammaticales sont étroitement liées à la perception du monde par les locuteurs, ce qui pourrait expliquer la raison des similitudes entre différentes langues dans un différent contexte généalogique.*

***Mots-clés** : constructions impersonnelles, constructions locatives, ordre des mots*

1. Introduction

Impersonal constructions have been widely studied across different languages in the world. Malchukov and Ogawa (2011) have approached the topic from a typological perspective employing a semantic map approach. Yi and Siewierska (2011) have made classification of the so-called non-referential impersonal constructions in Mandarin. Ramat and Sansò (2011) give a case study of impersonals in Italian, while F. Gulyás and Speshilova (2014) study impersonals and passives in contemporary Udmurt. F. Gulyás (2013) provides classification of Komi impersonals and of impersonal constructions in other Finno-Ugric languages in details (F. Gulyás 2016). However, cross-linguistic studies of impersonal constructions are still marginal. The aim of the present paper is to provide comparison of the Chinese impersonal construction containing a locative noun phrase, a verbal phrase, and a non-locative noun phrase (henceforth, NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP) and its equivalents in English, Hungarian, Burmese, and Persian and analyze the results from the perspective of cognitive

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linguistics.

Siewierska (2008: 116), in her paper, states that impersonal constructions have received both a structural and a communicative-functional characterization. From the structural perspective, impersonalization is connected with the lack of a canonical subject and from the functional plane with agent defocusing. In fact, the two characterizations of impersonalization are often overlapped with each other. In this paper, I adopt Siewierska's classification of impersonals (2008: 116) and analyze the NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP construction in Mandarin and its translations in other languages based on the classification. Though the NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP construction in Mandarin does not evolve from passive construction, it is very good example of impersonals according to the above definition. For example[1],

(1) 花园里种了很多玫瑰。
Huāyuán-li zhòng-le hěnduō měigui.
garden-LOC grow-PFV many rose
'In the garden, (people) have grown many roses.' (Mandarin; personal knowledge)

In the above example, a canonical subject is missing; at the same time, the agent of the verb *grow* is not present. If we do not fill the position for the agent in the English translation, the sentence can be expressed in passive voice in the following way:

(2) *Many roses are grown in the garden.* (English)

Example (2) shows that the Mandarin construction does not have a morphosyntactic equivalent in English. If we study the same phenomenon in other languages, what will be discovered?

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

a) What morphosyntactic similarities and differences can be found among the five languages?

b) Can the NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP constructions be corresponded to when we translate from Chinese into the other languages?

c) How do we analyze the impersonal constructions (NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP) from the perspective of cognitive linguistics?

After a general introduction in Section 1, the rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides some orientation on the theoretical background of the study and consists of three parts: classification of impersonals, typological features of five languages and theory of cognitive linguistics; Section 3 presents the methods of data collection and the limitation of the method; Section 4 makes morphosyntactic comparisons between Chinese and the other four languages and managed to answer the second research question, whereas Section 5 discusses the results and analyses the impersonal constructions from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. The final section concludes the study. The reader can find an appendix with a list of abbreviations attached below the conclusion.

2. Theoretical background

As there are five languages to compare, the impersonal constructions will be discussed from a typological perspective. According to *The World Atlas of Language Structures* (WALS, Dryer and Haspelmath 2013), most languages in the world place the subject before the verb (with the values 1192 out of the 1496 languages of the sample in total) while only a few languages place the verb before the subject (with the values 194 out of the 1496

[1] There is an appendix with a list of abbreviated category labels at the end of the paper. I followed *The Leipzig glossing rules* (2015) with some minor modifications.

languages of the sample in total, cf. Dryer 2013). Besides, there are 110 languages with no dominant order. Here the NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP construction in Mandarin deviates from the canonical SV or VS word order as there is no overt subject. As to the construction, there are numerous arguments about which part is the subject, the first part NP_{LOC} or the last part NP? Or neither of them?

2.1 Classification of impersonals

According to Siewierska (2008: 116-120), there are four types of impersonals. The first type refers to those with a subject which is not fully referential, meaning that the grammatical subject is not specific. For example, clauses with the impersonal pronoun *man* (which is a free form) in German and *they* in English as subjects are of this type (Siewierska 2008: 116). In Chinese, we often use *ren* (meaning 'man' in general), *yí-gè-rén* (one-CLF person, meaning non-referential one person), *rén-men* ('people' in the plural form) to denote impersonality in the sense that the speaker can refer to anybody or sometimes a specific person (Yi and Siewierska 2011: 551). For example,

(3) 人非圣贤，孰能无过。
Rén fēi shèng-xián, shú néng wú guò.
man not sage, who can free from error
'As everybody is not a sage, who can be entirely free from error?' (Mandarin, personal knowledge)

Example (3) is a Chinese proverb. As *ren,* used in a general sense, does not refer to any specific person, the whole sentence is an impersonal sentence. *Shu*, as an Old Chinese character, means *who* and functions as an interrogative pronoun.

The subject of the first type can also be a special impersonal pronoun as Italian *si* in example (4) or it can be omitted and referred only by verbal morphology as in the Hungarian example (5a):

(4) *Si lavora sempre troppo*.
si work:3SG always much
'One always works too much.' (Italian; Siewierska 2008: 117)

(5a) *Magyarország-on már megint emel-t-ék a tej ár-á-t.*
Hungary-SUP already again raise-PST-OBJ.3PL the milk price-3SG-ACC
'They have raised again the price of the milk in Hungary.' (Hungarian; elicited)

Here, the pronoun *si* is regarded as a marker of generic human agency in Italian while in Hungarian the non-referential subject, is marked through the third person plural verbal agreement, e.g. by the suffix *-ék* in the verb *emelték*.

Impersonals of the second type have a non-canonical subject, which is usually characterized by a dative case or a genitive case. For example,

(6) *Mér likar ágoetlega við hann.*
Me: DAT like:3SG well with him: ACC
'I like him.' (Icelandic; Barðdal 2004: 105)

The third type of impersonals occurs in languages which have overt expletive subjects. As a result, the grammatical subject is obligatory but it appears as some dummy place filler according to Siewierska (2008: 119). For example,

(7) *It rains heavily.*
(English; personal knowledge)

The fourth type of impersonals has no overt subject at all, which is most theory dependent. It means that most constructions of the type have no obligatory nominal arguments or the verb argument might take an object rather than a subject. For example,

(8) *Svetaet*.
dawn.PRS.3SG
'It dawns.' (Russian; Malchukov and Ogawa 2011: 25)

The impersonal construction in the present study illustrates subtype four of Siewierska's (2008) classification, i.e., a construction lacking an overt grammatical subject. The NP_{LOC} takes the subject position but it cannot act as the agent, instigator or initiator. The last part of the construction cannot be qualified as the subject either because of the end position in the clause as well as the indefinite reference. It is more object-like, just as example (1).

2.2 The typological features of five languages

The five languages that I study are Chinese (especially Mandarin), English, Hungarian, Burmese, and Persian. Their typological features will be discussed below.

2.2.1 Chinese

Based on the data from Glottolog 4.7 (Hammarström, et al. 2022), Mandarin Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family and has thirty-one dialects. Chinese is the official language of China and Singapore. It is spoken by more than one point four billion people in China and learned by two hundred million people in the whole world as a foreign language. The word *Mandarin*, which stands for the major dialect of China, is a group of Chinese dialects that are natively spoken across most of northern and southwestern China. From the typological perspective, Chinese is an isolating language, because there is very little morphological complexity in any of the Chinese languages and each word is made up of only one morpheme and cannot be further analyzed into component parts (Li and Thompson 1989:11). Mandarin is not easy to classify in terms of word order for the following three reasons: a) subject is not easy to define in the grammar of Mandarin; b) a basic order of words and phrases is governed by considerations of meaning rather than grammatical functions; c) Mandarin is inconsistent with the features that correlate to VO or OV order based on Greenberg's typological scheme (Li and Thompson 1989: 19). One of the most prominent features of Mandarin sentence structure is the topic, in other words, the given information. For example,

(9) 这本书我读过了。
Zhè-běn shū wǒ dú-guò le.
the-CLF book I read-EXP CRS
'I have read this book.' (Mandarin; personal knowledge)

Here the topic (*book*) is placed at the beginning of the sentence. It always refers to something about which the speaker assumes the listener has some knowledge. Therefore, one cannot claim that this sentence is following the typical SVO or SOV word order, since it has a TVO (topic – verb – object) order.

2.2.2 English

English is a West Germanic language of the Indo-European language family, with its earliest forms spoken by the inhabitants of early medieval England. It has altogether one hundred and fourteen dialects (Hammarström, et al. 2022). As of 2019, four hundred million people spoke English as their first language, and one point one billion spoke it as a secondary language. English is regarded as a lingua franca in the world.

The earliest form of English is called Old English or Anglo-Saxon (c. year 550–1066). Old English is essentially a distinct language from Modern English and is virtually impossible for 21st-century English-speakers to understand. Its grammar was similar to that of modern German: Nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs had many more inflectional endings and forms, and word order was much freer than in Modern English. Modern English has case forms in pronouns (*I, me, my*) and has a few verb inflections (*go, goes, going, went, gone*), but Old English had case endings in nouns as well, and verbs had more suffixes expressing person and number (Hogg 1992; Smith 2009).

Modern English is a moderately analytic language, which is characterized by a relatively frequent use of function words, auxiliary verbs, and changes in word order to express syntactic relations, rather of inflected forms (Lian 2010). Within the constituents of English clauses, the verbal element (V) is the most central one, and it is preceded by the subject (S). Following the verb there may be one or two objects (O), or a complement (C), which follows the object if one is present. The most peripheral element is the adverbial, which can occur either initially (in front of the subject) or finally (after the verb, and after the object or complement if one is present). Many adverbs may also occur medially (Quick, et al. 1985). The basic word order may be summarized as SVO.

2.2.3 Hungarian

Hungarian, also called Magyar, is a member of the (Finno-)Ugric branch of the Uralic family. It is spoken by approximately ten million people in Hungary and by an additional three million in the neighboring countries, the United States, Australia, and elsewhere. It has ten dialects (Hammarström, et al. 2022), but they are, for the most parts, mutually intelligible. Word order in Hungarian is quite different from English in a number of ways. In English, it is the word order of sentences that tells us what the subject and object are, whereas in Hungarian, the extensive case system clearly marks the grammatical function of nouns or noun-phrases (Kenesei et al. 2006: 239). As subjects and objects are easily distinguished by their case markings, Hungarian need not rely on word order to determine grammatical function. For example, sentence (5a) can also be written in another word order as in sentence (5b).

(5b) *A tej ár-á-t már megint emel-t-ék Magyarország-on.*
the milk price-3SG-ACC already again raise-PST-3PL Hungary-SUP
'They have raised again the price of the milk in Hungary.' (Hungarian; elicited)

Therefore, Hungarian allows for a flexible word order unknown in English, but that does not mean that word order can be quite casual in Hungarian, because people use word order to background and/or highlight important information. In fact, Hungarian is claimed to be a "topic-prominent" language, with the topic, as previously known or background information, starting the sentence and the comment (or new information) following

(Kenesei et al. 2006: 240). This is a common feature of Hungarian and Mandarin.

2.2.4 Burmese

Burmese is a Sino-Tibetan language spoken in Myanmar (also known as Burma), belonging to the Lolo-Burmese sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burmese branch in the family. It is spoken by the majority of the population in Myanmar (formerly Burma). It is also spoken in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and the U.S. In 2022, the Burmese-speaking population has reached thirty eight point eight million. It has only three dialects (Hammarström, et al. 2022). Burmese is an analytic language, which means that grammatical functions are expressed by word order (mainly SOV) and by postpositional particles rather than by inflections as is the case in Indo-European languages (Lian 2010:1). Particles include subject markers, equivalents of prepositions, and classifiers. Particles can also have discourse functions, for example, to indicate the topic of a sentence. Most Burmese verbs consist of a root and separate particles (suffixes) that represent mood, aspect, tense, positive/negative, and politeness (Jenny and Tun 2016). It is a process of agglutination, as the written system of Burmese derived from the Pahlavi script of South India (Wun 1958). To express anything but the very simplest things we must combine words of different meanings. In English, for example, you have separate roots for singular *sheep*, *ewe*, *lamb* and *mutton*. To render these distinctions a Burmese will say: *tho* 'sheep', *tho-ma* 'ewe', *tho-galay* 'lamb', and *tho-tha* 'mutton' (Wun 1958). Regarding the word-formation rule, Mandarin and Burmese are quite similar, because a Chinese will say: *yáng* 'sheep', *mǔ-yáng* "ewe', *yáng-gāo* 'lamb', and *yáng-ròu* 'mutton'.

2.2.5 Persian

Persian is a Western Iranian language belonging to the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian subdivision in the Indo-European language family. Persian is also called Farsi inside Iran, Dari in Afghanistan and Tajiki in Tajikistan — in the same way that German is called Deutsch by the Germans themselves. It is still the national language of Iran with about eighty-million speakers (93% literacy in adult population) and at least fifty million more in neighboring countries and in diaspora. Western Farsi has sixty-three dialects. (Hammarström, et al. 2022) There is a lot of flexibility in word order in Persian, especially in less formal or colloquial speech. Since the person of the subject is marked on the Persian verb as a conjugational suffix, a Persian sentence in its simplest form can be just a verb, like *shenidi?* (*Did you* [2SG] *hear?*) or *rafte* (*He / she / it has gone*). This means that the subject does not have to be always mentioned in the form of a separate personal pronoun (Yousef 2018: 265). A simple sentence of Persian follows the most common, standard word order, i.e., SOV, with adverbial or adverbial phrases and other temporal or locational adverbs making the sentence so long (Yousef 2018: 266). In Modern Persian, there is no gender, and no declension of nouns and adjectives for different persons or cases. Verbs express person and number categories by a set of conjugational suffixes.

2.3 Cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics, as an approach to the study of language, began to emerge in the 1970s and has been gradually vibrant since the 1980s. This approach holds an encyclopedia view on meaning as conceptualization comes from people's bodily experience of the world. In Geeraerts' and Cuyckens' words, "language is a way of organizing knowledge that reflects the needs, interests, and experiences of individuals and cultures" (2007: 5). Cognitive linguistics covers a wide range of central topics, such as image schemas, categorization, standard and extended conceptual metaphor theory, conceptual metonymy

theory, concepts and conceptualization, etc. (Wen and Taylor 2021). It values the relationship between language, culture, and cognition.

Impersonal constructions, as a subtype of grammatical structures, are believed to be shaped by the way of cognition of the speakers in a specific cultural group. The relations between a sign and a concept are quite universal, so the metonymy is also universal like "metaphors we live by" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Radden and Kövecses (1999: 21) have given a well-known definition of metonymy: "Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same cognitive model." Panther and Thornburg (2007) further elaborate the realms of conceptual metonymy and assume that the relation between one sign (Concept-Form) and another sign (Concept-Form) is quite significant in conceptual metonymy. Brdar and Brdar-Szabó (2017) argue that the relationship between grammar and metonymy often involves genuine two-way interaction.

3. Methodology

For the purpose of examining whether the Mandarin NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP constructions can be corresponded to when translated into the other languages, I gathered Chinese sentences with the NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP constructions. For the convenience of discussion, I select three sentences for a detailed analysis. The data come from Wang's work (2016), even though I do not quite agree with Wang's classification of impersonal constructions in Chinese. In my view, the NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP constructions illustrate subtype four of Siewierska's classification (2008: 120), while Wang (2016: 367) claims that the constructions correspond to Siewierska's (2008) second type of impersonals.

Then I transcribed the three Chinese sentences with Latin script, added interlinear glossing and English translations. For the other three languages, such as Hungarian, Burmese and Persian, I asked native speakers to translate them into their native languages. The interlinear glossing of the three languages is done with the help of the native speakers. Based on the above data, I compared morphosyntactic similarities and differences among the five languages.

Although the data given here are not rich and diversified, the comparison can help me to examine the grammatical features of the five languages. However, further data and studies are needed to elaborate the complex impersonal constructions cross-linguistically.

4. Results

Below are the data I gathered and comparison was given regarding their morphosyntactic similarities and differences. In the process of the comparison, I looked into the following points in the translations: whether the verb is in the active or the passive form; whether there is a grammatical subject in the sentence or not. If there is one, whether it is in its canonical form, like in the nominative case or in the typical subject positions. As for the general typological profile, I examined whether the adpositions are preposition or postpositions in the target languages as well as the order of the possessor (genitive) and the possessee (noun).

4.1 Chinese vs. English

The three Chinese sentences with interlinear glossing and English translation will be given here.

(10) 台上唱着戏。
Tái-shàng *chàng-zhe-xì*.
stage-LOC sing-DUR-opera
'On the stage, they are singing an opera.' (Mandarin; Wang 2016: 362)[1]

(11) *On the stage, there is singing of an opera.*
(English; personal knowledge)

(12) 收音机里播放着歌星音乐。
Shōuyīnjī-lǐ *bōfàng-zhe* *gēxīng yīnyuè*.
radio-LOC broadcast-DUR singer music
'On the radio, a singer's music is being played.' (Mandarin; Wang 2016: 362)

(13) 屋里开着会。
Wū-lǐ *kāi-zhe-huì*.
room-LOC have-DUR-meeting
'In the room, a meeting is being held.' (Mandarin; Wang 2016: 362)

As is said above, the syntactic structure of the original Chinese sentences is NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP. They share the same features: the notional subject of the three predicates *sing*, *play* and *hold* is not known, so we can classify them as impersonals with no overt subjects. When we translate them into English, the English equivalent of certain Chinese clause is either in the passive voice or is expressed via nominalization (cf. sentence (11)) or expletive subjects (cf. sentence (10)). The English translation of sentence (10) is in the active voice but it contains an expletive subject (*they*) to make the sentence complete, otherwise it will be ungrammatical. By comparing examples (10)-(13), one can see the following: a) the structures of the locative phrases are different. In Chinese, the structure is noun plus a locative particle, such as *shàng*, *lǐ*. Chinese has very rich locative particles, and the modern Mandarin has been moving away from the monosyllabic characteristics of Classical Chinese; in other words, morphemes in modern Mandarin words tend to be disyllabic (Li and Thompson 1989: 392). There is a list of locative particles collected by Charles N. Li and Sandra A. Thompson (1989: 391):

MANDARIN LOCATIVE PARTICLES

shàng	shàngbian	shàngmian	shàngtou	'on top of, above'
xià/dìxia	xiàbian	xiàmian	xiàtou	'under'
lǐ	lǐbian	lǐmian	lǐtou	'in, inside'
wài	wàibian	wàimian	wàitou	'outside'
qián	qiánbian	qiánmian	qiántou	'in front of'
hòu	hòubian	hòumian	hòutou	'in back of, behind'
páng	pángbian			'beside'
zhōngjian/dāngzhong				'in the center of'
	zuǒbian	zuǒmian		'left of'
	yòubian	yòumian		'right of'
dōngbu	dōngbian			'east of'
nánbu	nánbian			'south of'
xību	xībian			'west of'
běibu	běibian			'north of'
zhèr/zhèli	zhèbian	zhèmian		'this side of'
nàr/nàli	nàbian	nàmian		'that side of'

Figure 1
Locative Particles (Li and Thompson 1989: 391)

[1] The durative marker comes from Li and Thompson (1989). It signals ongoing, or durative, nature of an event.

In English, the structure of the adverbial – that correspond to Mandarin locative particles – is preposition plus noun phrase. Through the comparison, Modern Chinese still follow the morphemes in Classical Chinese, but inflectional endings and forms of Old English are quite few in modern English; b) the verbal forms are different. In Chinese, there is no inflectional endings for verbs in various tenses; while in English, the passive voice is made up of copula and past participle. A durative marker着(*zhe*) can be found in all the three Chinese sentences. This marker is used after the verb to show the action is ongoing.

4.2 Chinese vs. Hungarian

The Hungarian translation with interlinear glossing and English translation are introduced here.

(14) *A színpad-on egy operá-t énekel-nek.*
the stage-SUP an opera-ACC sing-PRS.3PL
'On the stage, they are singing an opera.' (Hungarian; elicited)

(15) *A rádio-ból egy énekes dal-a szól.*
the radio-ELA a singer song-3SG sound.PRS.3SG
'A singer's song is blowing out of the radio.' (Hungarian; elicited)

(16) *A ház-ban megbeszélés-t tarta-nak.*
the house-INE meeting-ACC hold-PRS.3PL
'In the room, they are holding a meeting.' (Hungarian; elicited)

In sentences (14)-(16), the structure of the Hungarian sentences is NP_{LOC} ^ NP ^ VP. In Hungarian, subject pronouns in all persons and numbers can be suppressed in any tense or mood; in fact, their presence is required only if they would occur in one of the more prominent positions, such as topic or focus (Kenesei et al. 2006: 68). If we further observe the morphology of verb in the sentences, *énekel-nek* and *tarta-nak* are made up of two parts. The first part is the stem of the verb, the second part is the suffix that can imply the person of the suppressed subject. And both *-nek* and *-nak* refer to the third person plural form of the subject. If certain classes of pronouns in a language may be omitted when the morphology can indicate the person and number of a verb, the language can be called pro-drop language (Nydia 2007: 630). So Hungarian is a pro-drop language. In fact, Chinese is a topic (discourse) pro-drop language, which allows the referential pronouns to be omitted, or be phonologically null because the pronoun can be inferred from contextual information (Li 2014:8).

Thus, I have the present findings: a) when the impersonal clauses in Chinese are translated into Hungarian, the original active voice can be adopted without using a passive one; b) suffixes are used extensively in Hungarian as opposed to particles in Mandarin; c) in sentence (15), Hungarians prefer to use *szól* ('sound') to achieve equivalence between Hungarian and Chinese.

4.3 Chinese vs. Burmese

The Burmese translation with interlinear glossing and English translation are shown here.

(17) *Sin paw mhar opera so nay tal*
stage on PCL opera sing PROG PCL
'On the stage, (people) are singing opera.' (Burmese; elicited)

(18) *Radio paw mhar asotaw tayouk yae thachin lar nay tal*
radio on PCL singer ART POSS song play PROG PCL
'On the radio, a singer's song is playing.' (Burmese; elicited)

(19) *Akan htae mhar aseaway loat nay tal*
room in PCL meeting hold PROG PCL
'In the room, (people) are holding meeting.' (Burmese; elicited)

Here the syntactic structure of the above Burmese sentences is NP_{LOC} ^ NP ^ VP. The notional subject of the verbal phrase is not known, so we can classify them as impersonals with no overt subjects. As discussed in section 2.2.4, Burmese possesses the characteristics of an analytic language and an agglutinating language. Suffixes are widely used after locative phrase, verb, and at the end of the sentence. For example, in sentence (17), *mhar* is a particle following locative phrase 'on stage'; *nay* is a particle following the verb 'sing'; *tal* is a particle used at the end of the sentence. In the other two sentences, the same characteristics can be found. Burmese is also a postpositional language. In a locative phrase, the adposition follows the noun phrase it modifies. For example, in sentence (18), *paw* (on) follows *radio*; in sentence (19), *htae* (in) follows *akan* (room). Besides, the article follows the noun in sentence (18). Here, *tayouk* 'a' follows its head *asotaw* 'singer'. So, I have the following findings: a) in impersonal construction, Burmese, similar to Chinese, uses the active voice to express the action depicted by the clause. As the dominant word order for Burmese is SOV, the object precedes the verb. For example, in sentence (17), *opera* precedes *so* (sing); b) Burmese, similar to Chinese, uses a specific particle at the end of a sentence. In sentences (17)-(19), the same particle *tal* can be found. In Chinese, we often use *le* as sentence-final particle; c) Burmese use a specific particle *nay* to mark the progressive aspect of the verb, while Chinese use *-zhe* as the durative marker.

4.4 Chinese vs. Persian

The Persian translation with interlinear glossing and English translation are offered here.

(20) *Yek opera roo-ye sahne ejra-mishavad*
anopera on-EZ stage play-IPFV.PRS.3SG
'An opera is being played on stage.' (Persian; elicited)

(21) *Tarane-ye yek khanande az radio pakhsh-mishavad*
song-EZ a singer from radio broadcast-IPFV.PRS.3SG
'A singer's song is being broadcast from radio.' (Persian; elicited)

(22) *Yek jalase dar otagh bargozar-mishavad*
A meeting in room hold-IPFV.PRS.3SG
'A meeting is being held in room.' (Persian; elicited)

When the Chinese impersonal constructions are translated into Persian, the Persian equivalents are in the passive voice as there are no overt subjects in Chinese sentences. As mentioned in section 2.2.5, the Persian verbs express person and number by a string of conjugational suffixes, such as *-mishavad* in the above three sentences. The passive voice in Persian is formed with the auxiliary verb and the past participle of the main verb. The auxiliary verb used in Persian is *shodan* 'to get / become' (Yousef 2018: 258). It can take different forms, depending on the voice, aspect, tense and person. Here, -mishavad, as an auxiliary verb, is used in present imperfect tense, with -mi as a marker of imperfective, which indicates that the action is not finished or in an ongoing state. The structure of the

sentences is SAdvV pattern, quite different from NP_{LOC} ^ NP ^ VP constructions. So, I have the following findings: a) the Chinese constructions cannot be corresponded to Persian; b) as the adposition precedes the noun, Persian is a prepositional language; c) in sentence (21), suffix *-ye* in *tarane-ye* marks possession. In English genitive construction (e.g., *a singer's song*), the possessor precedes the possessee, while in Persian, the possessor follows the possessee.

5. Discussion

Based on the above comparative study of the impersonal constructions in Chinese with the translations from four other languages, we can perceive similarities and differences between these languages. As to sentence structure, the original Mandarin NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP constructions can be corresponded to Hungarian and Burmese in the closest way because Hungarian is also a pro-drop language with suppressed subjects and Burmese share a lot of common features with Chinese in the Sino-Tibetan family. However, the English equivalent of certain Chinese clause is either in the passive voice or is expressed via nominalization. The Persian translation of the Chinese sentences is also in passive voice. Burmese has the closest equivalent to the durative aspect in Chinese. Besides, I have some typological findings. The adposition-noun order is determined by whether the language is postpositional or prepositional. As Hungarian and Burmese are postpositional language, the adposition follows the noun it modifies. But for the other three languages, the adposition mostly precedes the noun. Lastly, the genitives, influenced by the basic word order, have different forms in different languages.

In the above comparison, to my surprise, more similarities are found between the five languages, even though they might come from different genealogical background. I wonder why the impersonal construction of Chinese can be corresponded mostly to Hungarian and Burmese. Do speakers of the three languages have similar bodily experience of the world? In the NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP construction, the foremost position of the locative noun phrase is highlighted. The noun phrase is denoted by a locative noun, which implies a relationship between the noun and the implied spatial meaning. In fact, the noun is not limited to the non-living things in sentences (10), (12) and (13) mentioned above; it can be living things in the world, such as human beings, animals and plants. For example,

(23) *Nín -na lái-le jǐ-gè bāng-shǒu?* (您那来了几个帮手？)
2PL.FML that come-PFV several-CLS helper
'How many helpers come to your (location)?' (Mandarin; personal knowledge)

(24) *Zhè-kē dīng-xiāng-shù xiè-le bùshǎo-huā.* (这颗丁香树谢了不少花。)
the-CLS ding-xiang-tree wither-PFV many-flowers.
'Many flowers withered in the tree.' (Mandarin; Yuan 1998: 155)

In sentence (23), *nín* referring to a human being, is conceptualized as a place, which means your location, but the location is not specified in the speaker's discourse but can be understood by the hearer in the context. In sentence (24), *ding-xiang-tree* is also conceptualized as a place, which holds possessive relations with the flower. Both the two cases are good examples of noun (sign) – for – place metonymic relations. In such an intra-domain mapping, the place symbolized by the sign becomes the ground of the event narrated, while the notional subjects can be regarded as the figure. So, the impersonal construction, even though deviating from the normalized word order, mirrors speakers' perception of the world, foregrounding the location where events happen and embodying the focus and the attention of the speaker. As Chinese and Hungarian are topic-prominent

languages, both languages prefer to place the topic at the very beginning of the sentence, even in the impersonal construction.

6. Conclusion

In this study, the Chinese impersonal construction NP_{LOC} ^ VP ^ NP and its translations are studied across five different languages. When the construction is translated from Chinese into English, Hungarian, Burmese and Persian, both similarities and differences can be found among them. One of the significant findings is the Mandarin impersonal construction can be best corresponded to Hungarian and Burmese. However, the English and Persian equivalents of certain Chinese impersonals are in the passive voice. I also made observations on the data from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Chinese and Hungarian, as topic-prominent languages, prefer to place the topic at the beginning of the sentence, which is denoted by a noun phrase, which can be further conceptualized into the place where the event happens. The metonymic analysis of the impersonal construction provides a fresh way to examine the similarities between Chinese and other languages. Grammatical structures are closely related to speakers' perception of the world. That is why we can always find similarities between languages within different genealogical background.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
ADV	adverbial
ART	article
CLF	classifier
COP	copula
CRS	currently relevant state (*le*)
DUR	durative
ELA	elative
ESS	essive
EXP	experiential aspect (*-guo*)
INE	inessive
LOC	locative
PASS	passive
PCL	particle
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PROG	progressive
PRS	present
SG	singular
SUP	suppressive

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