

For example:

- (4) tā bēi mà LE  
3sg BEI scold PFV/CRS

S/He was scolded.

- (5) wǒ bēi qiāng LE  
I BEI rob PFV/CRS

I was robbed.

We will present other variations of (1) later in this chapter. At this point, the two forms of the passive construction represented by (1) and (3) will be the focus of our discussion. First we will talk about their use and function in Mandarin, and then we will discuss their grammatical characteristics.

## 16.1 Use and Function

### 16.1.1 Adversity

The *bèi* passive in Mandarin, like those of Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, and other Asian languages, is used essentially to express an *adverse* situation, one in which something unfortunate has happened. For instance:

- (6) jiǎozi bēi (gǒu) chī — diào LE  
dumplings BEI (dog) eat — down PFV/CRS

The dumplings got eaten up (by the dog).

- (7) qiáo bēi (dà) — shuǐ chōng —  
bridge BEI (big) — water wash —

zǒu LE  
away PFV/CRS

The bridge got washed away (by the flood).

## CHAPTER 16

# The *bèi* Construction

The term *passive* in Mandarin is generally applied to sentences containing the coverb *bèi* with the following linear arrangement (where NP = noun phrase):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) NP<sub>1</sub> bēi NP<sub>2</sub> verb

For example:

- (2) tā bēi jiějie mà LE  
3sg BEI elder:sister scold PFV/CRS

S/He was scolded by (his/her) older sister.

This type of construction has the direct object noun phrase, that is, the thing or person affected by the action of the verb, in sentence-initial position. This direct object noun phrase is followed by the passive coverb *bèi*, which introduces the agent of the action. We will call this the *bèi* noun phrase. The verb occurs in sentence-final position, as it does in the *bǎ* construction. Thus, in sentence (2), the first noun phrase, *tā* 's/he', is the direct object of the verb *mà* 'scold'; the *bèi* noun, *jiějie* 'older sister', is the agent, the one who did the scolding.

Schema (1), however, is not the only form in which the passive construction can occur. There are a number of variations. One important variation of (1) occurs when the agent, NP<sub>2</sub>, is not present:

- (3) NP<sub>1</sub> bēi verb