

Vocabulary Participation and Grammatical Formula Shifts

By Yao Shen

Two occurring sentences in present day English are "The man is beaten" and "The man is cooking." The grammatical formula of the first sentence is $N+be+V-n$ (past participle) often referred to as the passive; that of the second is $N+be+V-ing$ (present participle) frequently called the non-passive.

	passive:	non-passive:
$N+be+V-n$	The man is beaten	
$N+be+V-ing$		The man is cooking

Two other occurring sentences are "The man is gone" and "The meat is cooking." They parallel the first two sentences in their fitness to the formulas.

$N+be+V-n$:	$N+be+V-ing$
The man is beaten	The man is cooking
The man is gone	The meat is cooking

But as example sentences of the passive and the non-passive, the second two do not parallel the first two. "The man is gone" is non-passive, and "The meat is cooking" is passive.

The four sentences must be re-distributed, and the one-to-one relationship between $N+be+V-n$ for the passive and $N+be+V-ing$ for the non-passive must be revised in the following way.

	passive:	non-passive
$N+be+V-n$	The man is beaten	The man is gone
$N+be+V-ing$	The meat is cooking	The man is cooking

The re-distribution shows that in present day English, each of the two formulas may occur as both the passive and the non-passive.

On the other hand, "The man is come" as an example of $N+be+V-n$ in present day English is most likely not to occur, nor is "The meat is serving" as one of $N+be+V-ing$. The occurrence of a sentence, other than because of semantic reasons, depends upon the participation of each specific word in a particular grammatical formula.

For example: "The man is come" does not occur, but "The man has

The spring, 1970 issue of TESL Reporter will feature an article by Dr. Yao Shen of the Department of English at the University of Hawaii, summarizing the questions raised by ESL teachers in Korea and the Philippines during her summer, 1969 assignment. She has just returned from an invitation by Ewha Woman's University in Seoul, followed by one from the Language Study Center, Philippine Normal College, to serve as a Ford Foundation Consultant in Linguistics and Language Teaching.

In addition to her numerous publications in several different countries, Dr. Shen has delivered papers at Congresses in Czechoslovakia, Germany, Greece, and Japan. Her name appears in dictionaries of scholars in England, Japan, Taiwan, and the United States. Professor Shen has also just concluded her service as guest editor of the Philippine Journal for Language Teaching, Volume VII, Nos. 1-2, the Charles C. Fries issue in memory of her late teacher at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

come" does; "The meat is serving" does not, but "The meat is being served" does. However, "The man is gone" and "The man has gone" both occur, and "The meat is cooking" and "The meat is being served" both do too. "Come" and "go" participate in N+be+V-n differently, and "cook" and "serve" participate in N+be+V-ing differently. The following visual aid tabulates the information.

non-passive:	N+be+V-n:	N+have+V-n:
	*The man is come	The man has come
	The man is gone	The man has gone
passive:	N+be+V-ing:	N+be+being+V-n
	*The meat is serving	The meat is being served
	The meat is cooking	The meat is being cooked

There is a historical phenomenon which accounts for the occurrence and non-occurrence of the sentences. It involves the shifting of the grammatical formulas realized in the various participations of individual words in the grammatical formulas.

N+be+V-n occurred both as the passive and the non-passive in Old English, Middle English, and Early Modern English. Remnants are still found in present day English. N+have+V-n has been the non-passive but not the passive.

passive:	N+be+V-n
non-passive:	N+be+V-n; N+have+V-n

"I am ill and gone to bed," "The army of France is landed," and "The king is come to his daughter" in Shakespeare's King Lear (1603-1606); "We have seen the Star of the East and are come to worship him," and "When they were departed" in The Authorized Version of the English Bible (1611), popularly known as the King James' version of The Bible are examples of the non-passive N+be+V-n in Early Modern English.

In present day English, these sentences would most likely occur as "I am ill and have gone to bed," "The army of France has landed," "The King has come to his daughter," "We have seen the Star of the East and have come to worship him," and "When they had departed."

Historically there has been a shift of the non-passive form N+be+V-n to N+have+V-n. The non-passive has been gradually shifting from N+be+V-n (the same as the passive) to N+have+V-n (different from the passive).

passive:	N+be+V-n
non-passive:	N+be+V-n -----> N+have+V-n

N+be+V-ing indicated both the passive and the non-passive, and still does. "The meat is cooking" is the passive, and "The man is cooking" is the non-passive.

In present day English, the passive N+be+V-ing sometimes also occurs as N+be+being+V-n, a passive formula which scholars claim did not appear until the second half of the eighteenth century. "The meat is cooking" occurring in the passive N+be+V-ing also occurs as "The meat is being cooked" in the passive N+be+being+V-n. But the non-passive N+be+V-ing as "The man is cooking" does not occur in N+be+being+V-n.

Vocabulary Participation

passive: N + be + V-ing; N + be + being + V-n
non-passive: N + be + V-ing

Historically there is the beginning of a gradual shift of the passive from N + be + V-ing (the same as the non-passive) to N + be + being + V-n (different from the non-passive).

passive: N + be + V-ing -----> N + be + being + V-n
non-passive: N + be + V-ing

Between the two sets of passive and non-passive formulas, there is a similar shifting process. The difference is that the non-passive shifts from the same as the passive to different from the passive, and the passive shifts from the same as the non-passive to different from the non-passive.

passive: N + be + V-n
non-passive: N + be + V-n -----> N + have + V-n

passive: N + be + V-ing -----> N + be + being + V-n
non-passive: N + be + V-ing

Chronologically the non-passive N + have + V-n has been consistently in the English language as early as Old English; it has been co-existing with the non-passive N + be + V-n. The passive N + be + being + V-n is a recent development; it is beginning to co-exist with the passive N + be + V-ing.

One set of four mutually exclusive sentences in present day English in their passive and non-passive are

passive:	Non-passive:
The chicken is eaten	The chicken has eaten
The chicken is being eaten	The chicken is eating

As formulas, N + be + V-n includes both the passive and the non-passive; N + have + V-n excludes the passive. N + be + V-ing includes both the passive and the non-passive; N + be + being + V-n excludes the non-passive.

passive:	non-passive:
N + be + V-n	N + be + V-n
	N + have + V-n
N + be + V-ing	N + be + V-ing
N + be + being V-n	

The sentence examples are

passive:

The man is beaten

The meat is cooking

The meat is being cooked

non-passive:

The man is gone

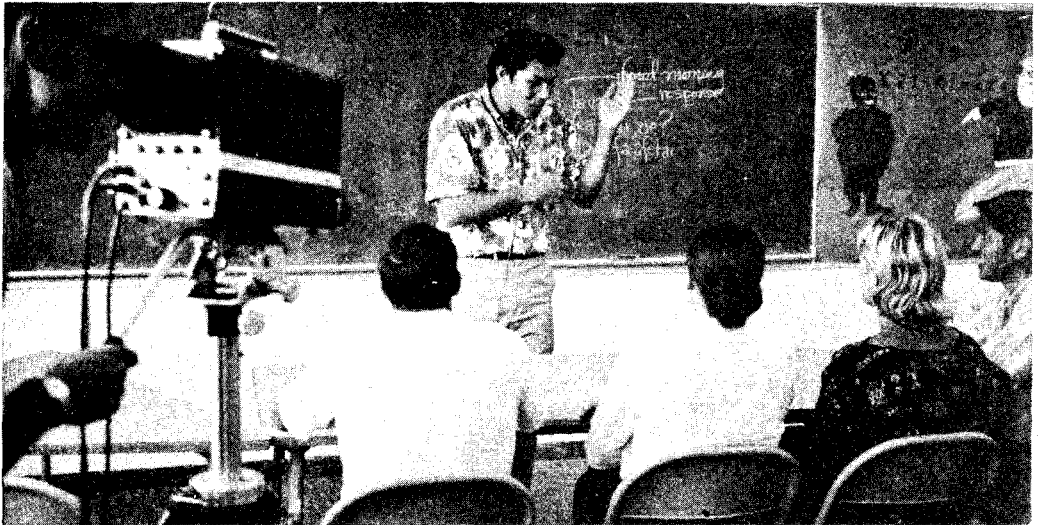
The man has gone

The man is cooking

Information on the historical shifts of grammatical formulas realized in various participations of individual words which account for the shifting process of the grammatical formulas can help in understanding the behaviors of some present day grammatical formulas with specific words. The examples used here are two sets of passive and non-passive in English.

References:

1. Albert C. Baugh, A History of the English Language, (second edition), Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., New York, 1957, pp. 296; 351-354.
2. Martin Joos, The English Verb Form and Meanings, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1964, pp. 91-98.



George Hunt, senior BATESL major, giving a micro lesson in beginning Samoan to other education majors. At left, Dr. Muse operates the TV camera.