

## Passives

### 1 Passives

- (1) a. Active: Dave invited Roumi.
- b. Passive: Roumi was invited by Dave.

#### 1.1 Some components of the passive

- (2) a. Demotion/Deletion of the external argument
- b. Promotion of the Direct Object

Additional Properties in English:

- (3) a. There is a passive participle (-en), which happens to be homophonous with the past participle.
- b. The passive participle combines with the auxiliary be, which is therefore sometimes called the passive auxiliary.
- c. The demoted external argument is optional, but if it is overtly realized it appears with the preposition by.

The external argument thought not syntactically projected as an argument is very much around in the passive. This distinguishes the passive from related unaccusative ergatives.

- (4) a. The tar was being melted.  
(There was someone who was melting the tar.)
- b. The tar was melting.  
(The water could be melting because it was very hot.)

#### (5) Hindi

- a. passive of kaat (transitive cut), syntactically agentive:

yeh per (Ram-dwaaraa) kal kaat-aa ga-yaa thaa  
this tree.MSg Ram-by yesterday cut-Pfv.MSg GO-Pfv.MSg be.Pst.MSg

'This tree was cut (by Ram) yesterday.'

- b. kat (intransitive cut), encyclopedically agentive, but not syntactically agentive:

yeh per (\*Ram-dwaaraa) kal kat-aa thaa  
this tree.MSg Ram-by yesterday cut-Pfv.MSg be.Pst.MSg

'This tree cut<sub>intr</sub> yesterday.' (no accurate English translation)

(the passive auxiliary in Hindi is jaa 'go'.)

In general, transitive verbs can be passivized crosslinguistically.

- Languages vary with respect to intransitive predicates -
  - some languages allow for passivization of unergative intransitives, suggesting that (2b) may not be obligatory in these languages, possibly related to variation w.r.t. EPP on  $T^0$ ,
  - few, if any, languages allow for passivization of unaccusative intransitives, suggesting the definitional nature of (2a).

## 1.2 Syntactic Treatment of the Passive

- (6) Burzio's Generalization: a  $v$  head that does not assign a  $\theta$ -role to its specifier does not license (accusative) case.
- $v_{Unacc}$
  - $v_{AG}$  without a specifier (i.e. the passive  $v_{AG}$  configuration)  
(note: Burzio's Generalization only applies to  $v$ 's. Otherwise  $T^0$  would not be able to license case.)
- (7)
- $[\sqrt{NP[uCase:-]}$
  - $[v_{AG} [\sqrt{NP[uCase:-]}]]$
  - $[-en[Pass] [v_{AG} [\sqrt{NP[uCase:-]}]]]$
  - $[be [-en[Pass] [v_{AG} [\sqrt{NP[uCase:-]}]]]]]$
  - $[T^0[uN^*] [be [-en[Pass] [v_{AG} [\sqrt{NP[uCase:-]}]]]]]]]$
  - ....

Cases like the following suggest that there might be a  $[uN^*]$  feature on the intermediate heads (have, be,  $v_{AG}$ ).

- (8)
- The apples might all have been eaten.
  - The apples might have all been eaten.
  - The apples might have been all eaten.
  - \*The apples might have been eaten all.  
(The ungrammaticality of (8d) needs an explanation. See suggestion in Sportiche (1988).)

Why do we need a -en[Pass]? How do we force a -en[Pass]?

- (9) Selectional Properties of -en[Pass],  $T^0$ , -en[Perf], and -ing[Prog]:
- $T^0$ : vP headed by  $v_{Unacc}$ , or a  $v_{AG}$  with a specifier.  
(have and be can be thought of as instances of  $v_{Unacc}$ .)
  - en[Perf]: vP headed by  $v_{Unacc}$ , or a  $v_{AG}$  with a specifier.
  - ing[Prog]: vP headed by  $v_{Unacc}$ , or a  $v_{AG}$  with a specifier.
  - en[Pass]: vP headed by  $v_{AG}$  without a specifier.

A semantic generalization:

- (10) a. vP headed by  $v_{Unacc}$ , or a  $v_{AG}$  with a specifier: saturated  
b. vP headed by  $v_{AG}$  without a specifier: unsaturated
- (11) a.  $T^0$ , -en[Perf], -ing[Prog]: saturated vPs  
The train arrived/has arrived/is arriving,  
John read/has read/is reading the paper.  
\*The paper read/has read/is reading.
- b. -en[Pass]: unsaturated vPs  
The egg was boiled.  
\*The train is arrived, \*John is read the paper.

The fact that -en[Pass] saturates an unsaturated predicate led some authors (cf. Baker et al. (1989)) to argue that the external argument  $\theta$ -role and the associate case are both assigned to this -en, thus accounting for Case-Absorption and  $\theta$ -absorption.

- (12) Further Selection:
- a. have selects for -en[Perf]  
b. be selects for everything else.

So be is only very loosely a 'passive' auxiliary. This is good given the existence of the [apple [eaten by John]]

The presence of the  $v_{AG}$  in the passive allows for indirect specification of the agent through a by-phrase. While there may be many ways in which the by-phrase indirectly specifies the agent, the one thing we would like to make sure given the preceding discussion is that the by-phrase should not saturate the external argument of  $v_{AG}$ . If it did, we would incorrectly not get -en[Pass].<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3 Three Kinds of Passive Participles

- (13) a. Eventive Passive: (only eventive)  
The door was closed at 5pm by John.
- b. Resultative Passive: (stative, with a previous event)  
The doors are closed. (as the result of a previous event).  
The cake is flattened.  
The metal is hammered.
- c. Adjectival/Stative Passive: (purely stative, no event)  
These doors were built closed.
- (see Embick (2004) for details)

<sup>1</sup>Some additional facts to keep in mind: (i) not all instances of by-phrases are relevant here. We are only interested in agent-introducing by-phrases - thus the by-phrase in the unaccusative The water will drain all by itself is not an exception to our correlation between the presence/absence of  $v_{AG}$  in a verbal structure and the possibility of a by-phrase. (ii) the aforementioned correlation between  $v_{AG}$  and the possibility of a by-phrase is limited to verbal contexts. Nominalizations allow for by-phrases even though there are reasons to believe that they do not involve the projection of a  $v_{AG}$  e.g. the destruction of Carthage by the Romans. See Marantz (1997).

The adjectival passive sometimes differs in form from the other two passives:

- (14) a. The door was opened at 5pm.  
b. The door is opened. (as a result of an opening event)  
c. These doors were built open/\*opened.
- (15) a. There was a door opened at 5pm.  
b. There are several doors opened right now.  
c. There are several doors open right now.
- (16) Embick's characterization:
- a. Eventive Passive:  
 $Asp^0 [v_{AG} [\checkmark \text{ NP}]]$
- b. Resultative Passive:  
 $Asp_R^0 [v_{FIENT} [\checkmark \text{ NP}]]$
- c. Stative (Adjectival) Passive:  
 $Asp_S^0 [\checkmark \text{ NP}]$
- For the resultative and the stative passive to work, it should be possible to associate a state with the root.
  - My characterization of the structural location of the NP differs from that of Embick, but as he indicates not much depends upon this.
  - The semantic characterization provided for the insertion of the -en[Pass] does not apply to the resultative passive and the stative passive. To make sure that we get the surface form -en, we need additional morphological assumptions. For a worked out proposal see Embick (2003).

## 2 Expletives

Expletives can appear with:

- (17) a. all passives (because of be)  
There were several apples eaten at the count fair.
- b. more generally everything that takes be as an auxiliary  
There was a man eating an apple at the county fair.  
There were several firemen available/in the room.
- c. many unaccusatives: arrive, accumulate, appear, materialize...  
Suddenly there arrived an undead creature from Athol.
- d. but not all unaccusatives: break, sink, ....  
???There sank a ship.

Levin (1993):88-91 notes that the verbs that allow for there subjects can be broken down into the following subclasses:

- (18) a. Verbs of Existence: blaze, bubble, cling, coexist,....., tower, wind, writhe  
 b. Verbs of Spatial Configuration: crouch, dangle, hang, kneel,....., stretch, swing  
 c. Meander Verbs: cascade, climb, crawl, cut,....., weave, wind  
 d. Verbs of Appearance: accumulate, appear, arise, ....., stem, supervene, surge  
 e. Verbs of Inherently Directed Motion (run and roll verbs): amble, climb, crawl, creep,....., strut, swim, trudge, walk  
 (and more....)

An important distinction to keep in mind is that Verbs of Change of State (see Levin (1993):240-248) do not permit there even though they are unaccusatives. Some examples: break, chip, rip, shatter, split, tear, bend, crease, rumple, wrinkle, bake, blanch, roast, toast etc.

Levin (1993) points out that verbs that allow for there subjects differ in where they allow for the postnominal NP to appear.

- (19) arrive vs. run
- a. i. There arrived three gentlemen from Verona.  
 ii. ??There arrived from Verona three gentlemen.  
 (making three gentlemen heavy can make (19a-ii) better.)
- b. i. \*There ran a raggedy looking cat into the room.  
 ii. There ran into the room a raggedy looking cat.  
 (The contrast between arrive and run does not follow from our system, and suggests that further distinctions might need to be made between arrive and run.)

A simple treatment of the above facts is suggested by Freeze (1992) who proposes that ‘verbs with a locative component in their meaning optionally select for there in their specifiers’.

Freeze’s solution is not widely adopted because of the conceptual difficulties associated with selecting a semantically vacuous element. But then we are left without an explanation for the ungrammaticality of (17) among other things.

Freeze’s explanation might shed light on contrasts such as the following:

- (20) a. There have arrived several people from Verona.  
 b. ??/\* There have several people arrived from Verona.  
 c. There were several people arrested by the police today.  
 d. ???There were arrested several people by the police today.

## References

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