

## 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. *kaat*, (intransitive *cut*), encyclopedically agentive, but not syntactically agentive:

yeh per (\*Ram-dwaaraa) kal kaat-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.
- a.  $v_{Unacc}$
  - b.  $v_{AG}$  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)
- a. [ $\sqrt{\text{NP[uCase:-]}}$ ]
  - b. [ $v_{AG}$  [ $\sqrt{\text{NP[uCase:-]}}$ ]]
  - c. [-en[Pass] [ $v_{AG}$  [ $\sqrt{\text{NP[uCase:-]}}$ ]]]
  - d. [be [-en[Pass] [ $v_{AG}$  [ $\sqrt{\text{NP[uCase:-]}}$ ]]]]]
  - e. [ $T^0$ [uN\*] [be [-en[Pass] [ $v_{AG}$  [ $\sqrt{\text{NP[uCase:-]}}$ ]]]]]]]
  - f. ....

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

- (8)
- a. The apples might all have been eaten.
  - b. The apples might have all been eaten.
  - c. The apples might have been all eaten.
  - d. \*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]:
- a.  $T^0$ : vP headed by  $v_{Unacc}$ , or a  $v_{AG}$  with a specifier.  
(*have* and *be* can be thought of as instances of  $v_{Unacc}$ .)
  - b. -en[Perf]: vP headed by  $v_{Unacc}$ , or a  $v_{AG}$  with a specifier.
  - c. -ing[Prog]: vP headed by  $v_{Unacc}$ , or a  $v_{AG}$  with a specifier.
  - d. -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)

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<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:  

$$\text{Asp}^0 [\text{v}_{AG} [\sqrt{\quad} \text{NP}]]$$
  - b. Resultative Passive:  

$$\text{Asp}_R^0 [\text{v}_{FIENT} [\sqrt{\quad} \text{NP}]]$$
  - c. Stative (Adjectival) Passive:  

$$\text{Asp}_S^0 [\sqrt{\quad} \text{NP}]$$
- 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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