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## Morphology of passives

Patricia Cabredo Hofherr

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# Chapter 1

## Morphology of passives<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This chapter presents an overview of the morphology found in passive constructions. Passive constructions vary with respect to a range of properties linked to object promotion and subject demotion. In particular, passives differ in the patterns of morphological, syntactic and semantic restrictions they display.

The discussion of the morphological marking of passive constructions pays particular attention to the grammatical restrictions observed with different passive constructions.

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## 1.1. Introduction

The present chapter provides an overview over the morphological means associated with passive constructions.

Here I adopt the definition in Keenan [1985, 273] and define passive constructions as subject-backgrounding operations that derive n-place predicates from n+1 place predicates. A canonical passive is a passive construction that in addition displays object promotion to subject.

Passive constructions are widely defined as constructions that operate a combination of subject demotion and object promotion. Section 1.2 provides a brief discussion of the main points of agreement and divergence between a range of different approaches adopted in the linguistic literature.

The chapter addresses two main issues: (i) the variety of syntactic and semantic properties associated with passive constructions cross-linguistically and (ii) what type of morphology is used to mark passive constructions.

Section 1.3 reviews diagnostics that distinguish passive constructions from other argument reducing constructions.

Sections 1.4 and 1.5 give an overview of restrictions on object promotion and subject demotion observed for passive constructions and examine constructions that diverge from the canonical passive with respect to the grammatical properties associated with subject demotion and object promotion respectively. Furthermore, section 1.5 considers the morphological marking of agentive phrases.

Sections 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 provide a range of diagnostics that help to distinguish passive constructions from functionally overlapping constructions such

as anticausatives, generalized subject constructions and object voice.

Section 1.6 discusses different types of morphology associated with passive constructions cross-linguistically. Passive morphology may appear as stem affixation, internal stem modification, reflexive markers, passive periphrases and generalized subject constructions. Section 1.6.5 examines passive markers derived from object voice marking more closely and 1.6.6 presents some examples of purely syntactic marking of passives without dedicated morphology.

## 1.2. Definitions of the passive

Definitions of the passive recognise two central properties of the passive: a prototypical passive foregrounds the direct object of the corresponding active predicate and backgrounds the subject [Keenan, 1975, 1985, Siewierska, 1984, Givón, 1988].

Siewierska [1984, 2] defines the passive as in (1) (see also the PASSIVE PROTOTYPE proposed in Shibatani 1985, 1988). Passives satisfying this definition are often referred to as CANONICAL PASSIVES or PROTOTYPICAL PASSIVES [Shibatani, 1985].

- (1) Definition CANONICAL PASSIVES:
- a. the subject of the passive clause is a direct object in the corresponding active (OBJECT PROMOTION)
  - b. the subject of the active clause is expressed in the passive in the form of an agentive adjunct or left unexpressed (SUBJECT DEMOTION)
  - c. the verb is marked passive

In what follows, I will use the terms LOGICAL OBJECT and LOGICAL SUBJECT to refer to the direct object and the grammatical subject of the active predicate corresponding to the passive. The expression of the demoted subject, if a passive permits it, will be called the AGENT PHRASE.

- (2) a. The earthquake shook the house.  
↔ The house was shaken by the earthquake.

- b. Logical object of *was shaken* and *shook*: *the house*
- c. Logical subject of *was shaken* and *shook*: *the earthquake*
- d. Agent phrase of *was shaken*: *by the earthquake*

The definition in (1) links information structure and grammatical relations by tying foregrounding of the object to realization as the grammatical subject (also called OBJECT PROMOTION) ((1)-a) and backgrounding of the subject to lack of lexical realization or grammatical coding as an adjunct (SUBJECT DEMOTION) ((1)-b).<sup>2</sup>

As Keenan [1985] points out, passive constructions differ from other syntactic means that are functionally similar in expressing information structure, such as topicalisation and dislocation. Passives operate at the level of the predicate (VP-level) contrasting with topicalisation and dislocation that are related to the periphery of the clause (CP-level).

In the literature, a passive construction satisfying all clauses of the definition in (1) is often called a CANONICAL PASSIVE. For the purposes of this overview I will follow Keenan [1985, 273] and define passive more widely in terms of subject demotion alone:

- (3) A passive is a subject-backgrounding operation that derives n-place predicates from n+1 place predicates. [Keenan, 1985, 273]

The following sections present a range of empirical facts that the two types of definitions seek to capture and in particular departures from the canonical

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<sup>2</sup>The definition of the passive adopted here includes a syntactic element: the syntactic demotion of the logical subject. There are purely functional definitions of the passive as e.g. Givón [2006, 338] "the clause-type whereby the agent of the corresponding active is radically de-topicalized and its patient role becomes, by default, the only topical argument". Notice that some passive constructions allow non-agentive verbs as in (i)

- (i) Er wurde                      von vielen geliebt. (German)  
       he AUX.PASS.PST.3SG by many loved  
       'He was loved by many.'

passive resulting in non-canonical passives.<sup>3</sup>

Siewierska's and Keenan's definitions of the passive agree on the fact that passives are subject-backgrounding constructions and therefore include an argument corresponding to the logical subject in their interpretation. This backgrounded subject can be implicit or realised explicitly in a syntactically demoted form. Section 1.3 discusses how passives differ from other constructions that modify the grammatical status of the logical subject.

Canonical passives as defined in (1) include object promotion, while Keenan's definition in (3) is in terms of syntactic subject demotion only. I adopt a definition in terms of subject promotion since a subset of passive constructions allows passivisation of verbs without direct objects such as intransitives and verbs with prepositional complements. Keenan's definition of passive constructions covers non-canonical passives that do not impose syntactic object promotion (NON-PROMOTIONAL PASSIVES), discussed in Section 1.4.

According to Keenan [1985, 247], the most widespread type of passive cross-linguistically – the BASIC PASSIVE – does not include a lexical expression of the demoted subject and has the following properties (see Siewierska [2013] for a detailed discussion).

- (4) The BASIC PASSIVE
- a. contains no agent phrase,
  - b. the non-passive form of the main verb is transitive,
  - c. the main verb expresses an activity, taking agent subjects and patient objects. [Keenan and Dryer, 2006]

Section 1.5 examines restrictions on the demotion of the logical subject that have been recorded for certain passive constructions concerning the referential properties of agent phrases.

Section 1.6 provides an overview of morphological marking of passive constructions, paying particular attention to the patterns of syntactic and semantic restrictions that are associated with different passive constructions. The definition of the canonical passive in (1) explicitly includes passive marking on

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<sup>3</sup>See Langacker and Munro [1975, 792]'s notion of *semi-passive* for constructions departing from their definition of proto-typical passives in one of the three properties they identify.



the verb in the definition of passive constructions. In contrast, the definition in (3) is neutral with respect to verbal marking and Keenan and Dryer [2006] entertain the possibility of passives without marking on the verb (see section 1.6.6 for discussion of zero-marked passives).

## 1.3. Passives and related meanings

One of the defining properties of passive is the backgrounding of the logical subject (1)-a and in the typical case a passive construction allows the subject to remain implicit (4).

These properties place passive constructions in the wider context of grammatical voice. GRAMMATICAL VOICE can be defined as formal marking of diatheses on the predicate, with a DIATHESIS defined as a mapping from semantic roles of arguments to grammatical relations in clauses [Zúñiga and Kittilä, 2019, 10]. Passives therefore have to be distinguished from other diatheses that background the logical subject of the basic predicate. Here I discuss diagnostics that distinguish between passives on the one hand and anticausatives, middles, resultatives and impersonal verb forms on the other.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.3.1. Passives and anticausatives

As shown in (5), **anticausatives** resemble passives since in both constructions the grammatical subject does not correspond to an agent. The definition of passives in terms of subject-**backgrounding** in (3) implies that passives are constructions that retain an agentive interpretation despite the syntactic demotion of the subject (5)-b. This property distinguishes passives from anticausatives that do not imply an implicit agent (5)-c.

- (5) a. Kim broke the vase. (active)  
b. The vase was broken. (passive)

---

<sup>4</sup>Many passive constructions overlap with reflexive and reciprocal constructions. This is plausibly due to the fact that reflexive and reciprocal interpretations are part of the semantics covered by middles [Kemmer, 1993], which in turn are a common source of passives.

- passive: an agent of the breaking event is implicit
- c. The vase broke. (anticausative)
- anticausative: underspecified with respect to the presence of an agent in the breaking event

Passives allow adverbs oriented towards the implicit subject, while anticausatives do not: (6)-b only has a pragmatically anomalous reading where the adverb applies to the surface subject *the vase*. Inversely, anticausatives allow expressions denying influence by an external instigator of the event, while passives do not (7).

- (6) a. The vase was broken deliberately/ carefully/ on purpose. (passive)  
 b. The vase broke #deliberately/ #carefully/ #carefully. (anticausative)
- (7) a. The vase was broken (**\*by itself**). (passive)  
 b. The vase broke **by itself**. (anticausative)

### 1.3.2. Passives and middles

Another family of constructions that shares properties with the passive are **middles**. The definition of the term MIDDLE is particularly heterogeneous across the linguistic literature (see e.g. Zúñiga and Kittilä 2019, 168-177 and references there for a survey of differing definitions). Here I will use the term *middle* for constructions that background the logical subject but yield a predicate that is limited in its aspectual range to stative and habitual readings.<sup>5</sup> An example of a middle in this sense is the so-called reflexive middle in French. This form is generally limited to stative property readings attributing a property to the logical object (8)-a and habitual readings as in (8)-b;<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Note that this use of the term MIDDLE is narrower than the definition in Kemmer's influential work on middle voice [Kemmer, 1993], where *middle* is used for forms that cover a wider range of meanings in which the grammatical subject is affected by the event.

<sup>6</sup>In French, eventive readings of reflexive marked forms are only possible in particular syntactic contexts such as impersonal constructions with the object remaining in object position

- (8) a. Ce livre se lit facilement. (French)  
 DEM book REFL read.PRS.IND.3SG easily  
 ‘This book reads easily.’ (property middle)
- b. Les fraises se mangent avec du sucre.  
 DET.PL strawberries REFL eat with OF-DET.MSG sugar  
 ‘Strawberries are eaten with sugar. / One eats strawberries with  
 sugar.’ (habitual middle)

### 1.3.3. Passives and resultatives

Resultatives are forms that express a state that is associated with the result of an event. However, **resultatives** resemble anticausatives in that an agent need not be implicit in the interpretation as in (9)-a, on a par with underived adjectives (9)-b and unlike passives (9)-c.

- (9) a. When the man came out of the lake, he was covered in algae.  
 (resultative: no agent covered him in algae)
- b. When the man came out of the lake, he was wet. (underived adjective)
- c. When the man came out of the lake, he was covered in blankets.  
 (passive: someone put blankets on him)

The interpretation of *was covered in* is ambiguous between a stative resultative and a passive interpretation. The two interpretations differ with respect to the presence of an implicit agent and to the temporal effect of the past tense on *was*. Under the most natural interpretation the interpretation of (9)-a is stative resultative: there is no implicit agent of the result and the state is simultaneous with the event of coming out of the lake. For (9)-b the pragmatically more plausible reading is passive: there is an implicit agent of the *covering* event and the event of covering is subsequent to the event of coming out of the lake.

While in English the copula *be* followed by the stative resultative participle

- 
- (i) Il s’est mangé 300 kg de viande. (French)  
 EXPL REFL-be.PRS.IND.3SG eaten 300 kg of meat  
 ‘300kg of meat was eaten.’ [Dobrovie-Sorin, 2005, ex. 34-c, and literature cited there]

and the passive have the same surface form, other languages distinguish the two constructions morphologically. Chichewa (Bantu), for example, distinguishes passive *-idw/-edw* and stative *-ik/-ek*. The semantic contrast between stative and passives is salient in negative sentences: as [Dubinsky and Simango, 1996, 750] observe, in the context of a half-cooked pot of beans the passive example (10)-a is false, while stative (10)-b is true.<sup>7</sup>

- (10) a. Nyemba si-zi-na-phik-idwe. (Chichewa)  
 beans NEG-AGR-PAST-cook-PASS  
 ‘The beans were not cooked (at all).’  
 (= ”there was no event of cooking the beans” →false) (passive)
- b. Nyemba si-zi-na-phik-ike. (Chichewa)  
 beans NEG-AGR-PAST-cook-STAT  
 ‘The beans were not cooked.’ (= ”the beans are not in a state called *cooked*” →true)(stative) [Dubinsky and Simango, 1996, ex 2a/b]

Passives also contrast syntactically with constructions like anticausatives, middles and resultatives with respect to diagnostics that probe the semantic availability of an implicit agent. Three widely used diagnostics are illustrated here with the passive and the resultative in Chichewa. The implicit agent in Chichewa passives is semantically active. The passive marker *-idw/-edw* allows a prepositional agent phrase (11)-a, agent-oriented adverbs (11)-b and purpose clauses (11)-c while the parallel examples with the stative marker *-ik/-ek* do not (12) (Mchombo 1993, 16-17, Dubinsky and Simango 1996, 751).

- (11) a. Mbale zi-na-tsuk-idwa (ndi Naphiri). (Chichewa)  
 plates AGR-PAST-wash-pass by N.  
 ‘The plates were washed (by Naphiri).’ [Dubinsky and Simango, 1996, ex 3a]
- b. Chitseko chi-na-tsek-edwa mwadala  
 door AGR-PAST-close-pass deliberately

---

<sup>7</sup>Abbreviations in the glosses - glossing from the original sources is maintained AGR = agreement, appl = applicative, FV = final vowel, NEG = negation, PASS = passive, PST = past, PRES = present, SM = subject marker, STAT = stative

‘The door was closed deliberately.’ [Dubinsky and Simango, 1996, ex 6a]

- c. Chakudya chi-na-phik-idwa      **kuti**      **anthu a-sa-fe**  
 food                    AGR-PAST-cook-**pass** [so].that people AGR-NEG-die  
**ndi njala**  
 from hunger  
 ‘The food was cooked so that people should not die from hunger.’  
 [Dubinsky and Simango, 1996, 751, exs 3a,5a,4a]

- (12) a. Mbale zi-na-tsuk-**ikaa** \*(ndi Naphiri). (Chichewa)  
 b. Chitseko chi-na-tsek-**eka** \*mwadala  
 c. Chakudya chi-na-phik-ika \*(kuti anthu a-sa-fe ndi njala)  
 [Dubinsky and Simango, 1996, 751, exs 3b, 5b,4b]

### 1.3.4. Passives, indefinite subject constructions and impersonal verb forms

Non-promotional passive constructions that lack (certain aspects of) object promotion (see section 1.4) resemble transitive subject backgrounding constructions with human impersonal subjects that do not affect valency. Constructions of this type are exemplified by antecedentless null 3pl pronouns (13)-a or sentences with dedicated impersonal subjects like the French *on* in (13)-b (for differences between types of impersonal human subjects see Cabredo Hofherr 2003, Barberà and Cabredo Hofherr 2018).<sup>8</sup>

- (13) a. Han            encontrado    una motocicleta en el    patio. (Spanish)  
           have.3PL FOUND.PTCP a    motorbike    in the yard

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<sup>8</sup>In studies that define passive constructions functionally in terms of semantic agent-backgrounding, constructions like (13) may also be included under the umbrella of *passive constructions*. As subject backgrounding in these examples is achieved by an indefinite pronoun without alteration of the transitive structure associated with the predicate, these constructions are not included in the definition in terms of valency reduction adopted here.

- (i)      **Someone** ate my breakfast.

- ‘They found a motorbike in the yard.’
- b. On a tué le président. (French)  
 on have.3SG killed DET.MS president  
 ‘They killed the president!’ [Koenig, 1999]

As pointed out by Blevins [2003], impersonal subject constructions differ from passive constructions: they are typically restricted to human implicit arguments and they can apply to any type of verb including modals (14), copulas (15)-a and unaccusative verbs (15)-b.

- (14) Quieren construir una autopista por aquí. (Spanish)  
 want.3pl build.inf a motorway by here  
 ‘They want to build a motorway around here.’

Another type of construction posing similar analytical challenges to indefinite subject constructions are impersonal verb forms that display syntactic subject suppression without object promotion, as found e.g. in Balto-Finnic languages and in Irish Gaelic and Welsh (see Cabredo Hofherr [2017a] for discussion). Blevins [2003] argues in detail that subjectless impersonal verb forms in the Balto-Finnic languages should not be analysed as passives. In particular, Blevins stresses that the impersonal verb forms are available for the equivalent of the copula *be* (15)-a, for unaccusative (non-agentive) verbs (15)-b and for modals (15)-c, predicates that are typically excluded from passive constructions cross-linguistically.<sup>9</sup>

- (15) a. Soomes ollakse nii tõsised. (Estonian)  
 Finland.INES be.IMP.PRS so serious.NOM.PL  
 ‘People in Finland are so serious.’ (copula)  
 [Blevins, 2003, 485, ex 10b citing Vihman 2001]
- b. Pärast suurt söömist kaalutakse nii mõnigi kilo rohkem.  
 after big eating weigh.PRS.IMP so several kilo more  
 ‘After a big feast, one weighs several kilos more.’ (unacc. verb)  
 [Blevins, 2003, 485, ex 11b citing Torn 2002:97]

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<sup>9</sup>See Blevins [2017], Legate et al. [2020] for a detailed discussion of the distinction between passives and other constructions that overlap in their functional and formal properties with passives.

- c. Kui te meie veebilehti külastate, võidakse  
 If you.PL our webpage.PART.SG use.2PL can.IMP  
 küpsiseid teie brauserile saata.  
 cookies.PART.PL your.PL browser.ALL.SG send.DA-INF  
 ‘If you use our website, cookies may be sent to your browser.’  
 (modal) (Matthew Baerman, p.c.)

### 1.3.5. Summary

The properties of passives overlap with other types of argument-reducing constructions. Common patterns associated with the different types are summarised in the following table – non-canonical passives that present possible exceptions are discussed in the following sections.

(16)

Properties of the passive	pass	property-middles	result	anti-caus.	impers. verb forms
logical object has syntactic subject properties	yes	yes	yes	yes	<b>no</b>
logical subject is semantically active	yes	no	<b>no</b>	<b>no</b>	yes
logical subject is demoted	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
logical subject is synt. absent	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
synt. optional	(yes)	no	no	no	(yes)
Allows non-agentive verbs (unaccusatives modals, copula)	no	no	no	no	yes
Aspectually restricted to stative/habitual	no	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	no	no

The sections that follow discuss constructions that provide counterexamples to these correlations.

## 1.4. Passive and object promotion

The canonical passive as defined in (1) requires object promotion and limits the promoted object to the logical direct object. The wider definition in (3) in terms of subject demotion, encompasses a range of non-canonical passives lacking object promotion in this sense.

Failure of object promotion with respect to the definition of the canonical passive can be of two types: (i) lack of promotion to subject (NON-PROMOTIONAL PASSIVES)<sup>10</sup> or (ii) promotion of an argument other than the direct object (OBLIQUE PASSIVES).

The constructions classified as **non-promotional passives** may lack object promotion to different degrees and for different reasons resulting in a range of partially overlapping types (17).

- (17) NON-PROMOTIONAL PASSIVES
- a. availability of promotion of the logical object
    - (i) passive constructions in which the logical object **cannot** be promoted.
    - (ii) passive constructions in which the logical object **need not** be promoted.
  - b. constructions blocking promotion of the logical object
    - (i) passive constructions without object promotion in **expletive constructions** (IMPERSONAL PASSIVES)
    - (ii) passive constructions without object promotion in **locative constructions**
  - c. types of verbs without a logical object
    - passive constructions in which there is **no visible logical** object to be promoted (INTRANSITIVE PASSIVES)

The wider definition of passives also includes OBLIQUE PASSIVES that allow promotion of an argument but are non-canonical insofar as promotion applies

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<sup>10</sup>Notice that the notion of NON-PROMOTIONAL PASSIVE can only be applied to languages in which the grammatical coding of transitive objects differs from the coding of intransitive subjects.



to constituents other than direct objects (18).

- (18) OBLIQUE PASSIVES: passive constructions in which a constituent **other than the logical object** can be promoted.

In what follows we discuss the different types in turn.

### 1.4.1. Non-promotional passives

Non-promotional passives are defined as lacking syntactic promotion of the logical object. This definition can apply at two levels. Passive constructions as a whole can be non-promotional in the sense that they never allow promotion of the logical object. These constructions contrast with passive constructions that display promotion of the logical object but also allow instances of the passive that are non-promotional.

An example of a non-promotional passive construction is the *ta*-passive in Ute [Givón, 2011]. In this construction the logical object remains in the object form<sup>11</sup> and number agreement on the verb is controlled by the (obligatorily) deleted agent (19)-c [Givón, 2011, 250].

- (19) Non-promotional passive construction
- a. ta'wachi tukuavi tuka-qha (Ute)  
man.SUBJ meat.OBJ eat-ANT  
'the man ate the meat'
  - b. tukuavi tuka-ta-qha  
meat.OBJ eat-PASS-ANT  
'The meat was eaten.' [Givón, 2011, 249-250, ex 40a/b]
  - c. tukuavi tuka-qha-ta-qha  
meat.OBJ eat-PL-PASS-ANT  
'The meat was eaten (by many).'

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<sup>11</sup>[Givón, 2011, 49]: "Ute nouns come in two basic forms, one for subject (also predicate and citation form), the other for non-subject. [...] As a general rule, the final vowel of the noun is silent (or whispered) in the subject form, and voiced in the non-subject form [...]"  
Whispered vowels are indicated by underlining in (19).

The non-promotional instances of passives that allow object promotion can be classified according to two properties: (i) availability of a logical object argument and (ii) syntactic promotion of the available logical object.

When a logical object is available, a passive construction may exclude promotion in principle as the Ute *-ta*-passive (19), or permit both a promotional and a non-promotional use, in which the logical object to retain object properties as in (20)-a and (21)-a. Notice that the constructions without object promotion appear in an expletive construction: the Danish example (20)-a has an expletive subject *der* ‘there’, while the Tswana example (21)-a has agreement in the locative class 17 marked by the prefix  $\chi\acute{u}$ - as opposed to agreement in class 10 corresponding to the noun class of the object *dì-q<sup>h</sup>òmú* ‘cows(CL10)’.

(20) Danish *blive*-passive: Non-promotional instances

- a. at **der** blev spist et æble (Danish)  
that **expl<sub>loc</sub>** PASS.AUX eaten an apple  
‘that there was eaten an apple’ (non-promotional passive)
- b. at et æble blev spist  
that an apple PASS.AUX eaten  
‘that an apple was eaten’ (promotional passive)  
[Vikner, 1995, 202:ex 80e]

(21) Tswana passive: Non-promotional instances

- a.  $\chi\acute{u}$ -rèkíl-w-é dì-q<sup>h</sup>òmú (Tswana)  
**I<sub>S/A</sub>:cl17** **EXPL**-buy.PRF-**pass**-FV PL-cow(CL10)  
‘Some cows have been bought.’ (non-promotional passive)
- b. dì-q<sup>h</sup>òmú **dí**-rèkíl-w-è (kí mà-bù:rù)  
PL-cow(CL10) **I<sub>S/A</sub>:cl10**-buy.PRF-**pass**-FV (by PL-Afrikaner(CL6))  
‘The cows have been bought (by the Afrikaners).’ (promotional passive) [Creissels, 2021, ch10: ex. 2c/2b]

**Passives of intransitives** represent a different case of non-promotional instances of passive constructions as intransitive verbs do not display a logical object in the syntax. The passive constructions in (20) and (21) also allow passives of intransitive verbs that take the non-promotional pattern with an expletive construction (compare (20)-a/(22)-a and (21)-a/(22)-b).

(22) Intransitive verbs patterning with non-promotional passive instances

- a. at der er blev                      danset (Danish)  
that EXPL<sub>loc</sub> is PASS.AUX.PTCP danced  
lit. ‘that there has been danced’ that people danced.’  
[Vikner, 1995, 202:ex 80e]
- b. χó-bùù:l-w-è                              (Tswana)  
I<sub>S/A</sub>:cl17<sub>EXPL</sub>-speakPRF-**pass**-FV  
lit. ‘There has been spoken.’ ‘People have spoken.’  
[Creissels, 2021, ch10: ex. ]

Givón and Kawasha [2006] claim that non-promotional passives are subject to fewer restrictions than promotional passives: While promotional passives are often restricted to transitive verbs and only apply to verbs with direct objects, non-promotional passive often allow intransitive verbs and modals. Blevins [2003] cautions against this conclusion and provides evidence that for subject-demoting constructions in the Balto-Finnic and Celtic languages this can be attributed to a misanalysis of impersonal verb forms – that preserve argument structure but suppress the subject argument – as passives.

The term IMPERSONAL PASSIVE is used with three interrelated but distinct definitions for a subgroup of non-promotional passives (as for non-promotional passives generally the term can apply to a passive construction or only to some instances of a passive construction).

(23) Definitions of the term IMPERSONAL PASSIVE

- a. Passives of intransitives [Keenan, 1975, Comrie, 1977]  
b. Passives with an expletive subject / in an expletive construction  
c. Passives without an argumental subject (I-passivization in Creissels 2021, ch10)

All three definitions of impersonal passives in principle cover passives of intransitive verbs as in (22). The definitions in (23)-b and (23)-c also allow for passives of transitive verbs without object promotion in expletive constructions as Danish (20)-a/ Tswana (21)-a. The widest definition includes subjectless constructions that have no promotional counterpart as e.g. the Ute *-ta*-passive (19) and the impersonal verb forms in the Celtic languages illustrated by Welsh

in (24)<sup>12</sup>

- (24) Fe'i lladdwyd (gan ddraig) (Welsh)  
him kill.IMPERS.PRET (by dragon)  
'he was killed (by a dragon)' [Comrie, 1977, 55, ex 39]

Note that passives fulfilling the definitions (23)b./c. may still restrict the passive construction to transitive verbs as the passive construction in Nuer (Nilotic, M. Baerman, p.c.). Another example is found in Bemba (Bantu): as Kula and Marten [2010] point out, the non-promotional *ba*-passive in Bemba admits non-promotional constructions (25)-a but nevertheless disallows intransitive verbs (25)-b (see the discussion of ex. (30) below).

- (25) a. bá-alí-péél-a umw-áana in-dáláma kulí Nsáma (Bemba)  
SC2-PST-give-FV 1-child 10-money by 1.Nsama  
'The child was given money by Nsama.' [lit. 'They gave the child the money (by Nsama).'] (= (30)-a)  
[Kula and Marten, 2010, ex. 15a]  
b. ?? bá-alí-lila ku mw-áàna (Bemba)  
SC2-PST-cry by 1-child  
?? 'It was cried by the baby. /The baby cried.'  
[Kula and Marten, 2010, ex. 9b]<sup>13</sup>

As the examples presented here show, discussions of impersonal passivisation need to specify the exact type of impersonal passive construction a language allows.

## 1.4.2. Oblique passives

Oblique passives are passives in which an argument other than the logical object is promoted. This property can apply to a passive construction as a whole or certain instances of a more general passive construction.

An example of an oblique passive construction is the German recipient-

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<sup>12</sup>For discussion of impersonal verb forms and references see Cabredo Hofherr [2017a].

<sup>13</sup>?? marks an example as degraded.

passive (see Askedal 2005 and references cited there) with the verbs *bekommen/kriegen* ‘get’. This passive construction promotes the dative object of the corresponding active (26)-a construction to grammatical subject of the recipient passive (26)-b.

- (26) a. Du liest ihr jeden Abend  
 2SG.NOM read.PRS.2SG 3SG.FEM.DAT every evening  
 Märchen vor. (German)  
 fairy-tales.PL.ACC PRT  
 ‘Every evening, you read fairy-tales to her(dat).’
- b. Sie bekam jeden Abend Märchen  
 3SG.NOM got.PST.3SG every evening fairy-tales.PL.ACC  
 vorgelesen.  
 PRT.read  
 ‘Every evening, fairy-tales were read to her.’ lit ‘she got fairytales read to’ [Askedal, 2005, 217]

More common are passive constructions that allow passivisation of a wider range of constituents including the direct object, so only some of their instances are oblique passives. This is exemplified with the French *se faire*+infinitive passive: example (27)-a is an oblique passive as the indirect object of the verb *offrir* ‘offer’ is promoted while in (27)-b the subject promotion targets the direct object of the verb *surprendre* ‘surprise’ as in a canonical passive.

- (27) a. Pierre s’est fait offrir un poste par l’oncle de  
 P. REFL-is faire.PTCP offer a position by the-uncle of  
 Louise. (Fr)  
 Louise  
 ‘Pierre was offered a position by Louise’s uncle.’  
 [Labelle, 2013, 235, ex 1]
- b. Les habitants se sont fait surprendre par  
 the inhabitants REFL AUX faire.PTCP surprise.*inf* by  
 l’éruption du volcan.  
 the-eruption of-the volcano  
 ‘The inhabitants were caught by surprise by the eruption of the volcano.’ (adapted from ex. 7 Labelle 2013, 238)

Passive constructions vary with respect to the patterns of passivisation they

allow with verbs taking more than two arguments. Some passive constructions allow promotion of constituents other than the logical Theme object.

In Bemba, for example, the *-w-* passive only allows promotion of the benefactive (29)-a, while the *ba-*passive allows promotion of the recipient (30)-b or the patient (30)-c with double object verbs [Kula and Marten, 2010].

- (28) Nsáma á-alí-péél-a umw-áana in-dáláma (Bemba)  
 1.Nsama SC1-PST-give-FV 1-child 10-money  
 ‘Nsama gave the child money.’  
 [Kula and Marten, 2010, 10, ex 14a] [active double object verb]
- (29) a. umw-áana á-alí-péél-**w**-a in-dáláma (kulí  
 1-child sc1-pst-give-**pass**-FV 10-money by  
 Nsáma)(Bemba)  
 1.Nsama  
 ‘The child was given money (by Nsama).’  
 b. \* in-dáláma shí-alí-péél-**w**-a umw-áana (kulí Nsáma)  
 10.money SC10-PST-give-**pass**-FV 1-child by 1.Nsama  
 Intd.: ‘Money was given to the child (by Nsama).’  
 [Kula and Marten, 2010, 10, ex 14b/c] [-w- passive + double object  
 verb]
- (30) a. bá-alí-péél-a umw-áana in-dáláma kulí Nsáma (Bemba)  
 SC2-PST-give-FV 1-child 10-money by 1.Nsama  
 ‘The child was given money by Nsama.’ [lit. ‘They gave the child  
 the money (by Nsama).’]  
 b. umw-áana bá-alí-**mu**-péél-a in-dáláma kulí Nsáma  
 1-child SC2-PST-**oc1**-give-FV 10-money by 1.Nsama  
 ‘The child was given money by Nsama.’  
 c. in-dáláma á-alí-péél-a umw-áana kulí Nsáma  
 10-money SC2-PST-give-FV 1-child by 1.Nsama  
 ‘The money was given to the child by Nsama.’  
 [Kula and Marten, 2010, 11, ex 15a/b/c] [*ba*-passive + double  
 object verb]

In Chichewa - as in many Bantu languages - applicative marking *-ír-* on the verb stem derives verbs taking an additional object that may be of different types. For applicative marked verbs, the passive marked with the verb suffix -

*idw*- allows promotion of a recipient (31)-b or an instrument (32)-b [Mchombo, 1993] (but not of benefactives [Bresnan and Moshi, 1990, 151]). The analysis of passives applied to verbs taking multiple objects therefore has to take into account a fine-grained semantics of the objects.

- (31) a. Alenje a-na-gúl-**ír**-á mbidzí mikêka. (Chichewa)  
**2**:hunters **2sm**-PST-buy-**appl**-FV 10:zebras 4:mats  
 ‘The hunters bought the zebras some mats.’
- b. Mbídzi zi-na-gúl-**ír**-idw-á mikêka ndí alenje.  
**10**:zebras **10sm**-PST-buy-**appl**-PASS-FV 4:mats by 2:hunters  
 ‘The zebras were bought some mats by the hunters.’  
 [Mchombo, 1993, 17, ex 28]
- (32) a. Anyăni a-ku-dúl-**ír**-á mpeni nthâmbi. (Chichewa)  
**2**:baboons **2sm**-PRS-cut-**appl**-FV 3:knife 9:branch  
 ‘The baboons are cutting the branch with a knife.’
- b. Mpeni u-ku-dúl-**ír**-idw-á nthâmbi ndi anyăni.  
**3**:knife **3sm**-PRS-cut-**appl**-PASS-FV 9:branch by 2:baboons  
 ‘The branch is being cut with a knife by the baboons.’  
 [Mchombo, 1993, 17, ex 29]

As the data presented here show, passive constructions allowing promotion of oblique objects vary considerably with respect to the semantic and syntactic properties of the oblique arguments available for passivisation.

### 1.4.3. Object promotion and morphological restrictions

The canonical *be*-passive in English applies to direct objects irrespective of their referential properties including 1st and 2nd person pronouns, definite and quantified objects as well as animate and inanimate logical objects (33).

- (33) a. I was invited. / You were invited. / They were invited.  
 b. Noone / everyone/ every child/ a child was invited. All the children/ these children/ some children were invited.  
 c. The piano/ The elephant was lifted out of the trailer.

Other passive constructions, however, are limited with respect to the types of logical objects that can be promoted. The reflexive passive in Spanish for example is not felicitous with 1st and 2nd person pronouns and proper names (Mendikoetxea 1999, see Cornilescu [1998] for reflexive passives in Romanian).<sup>14</sup>

- (35) a. Se encontraron varios juegos de llaves. (Spanish)  
 REFL find.PFV.PST.3PL several sets of keys  
 ‘Several sets of keys were found.’
- b. Me encontré. / Te encontraste.  
 REFL.1SG find.PFV.PST.1SG / REFL.2SG find.PFV.PST.2SG  
 ‘I found myself.’ / ‘You.SG found yourself.’  
 Not: ‘I was found. / You.SG were found.’

This restriction to 3rd person values is also found for auxiliary passives, as e.g. in the deontic passive in Basso Polesano (Italo-Romance) (36). The deontic passive in Basso Polesano is subject to further morphological restrictions: it admits simple tenses (37)-a, but excludes compound tenses (37)-b and non-finite tense forms (37)-c.

- (36) a. \*Mi voio petenà (Basso Polesano)  
 1SG.NOM want combed
- b. \*Ti te voi petenà  
 2SG 2SG.NOM want combed  
 ‘I need to be combed./You need to be combed.’  
 [Benincà and Poletto, 1997, 102]

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<sup>14</sup>In Spanish this restriction is referred to as *se no paradigmático* in the grammar of the Real Academia Española (2009). In the syntactic literature, the restriction is sometimes referred to as the person constraint in the literature on Romance reflexive passives. Stative property middles allow 1st/2nd person interpretation in some languages.

- (34) Je me transporte facilement (French)  
 1SG REFL.1SG transport.PRS.1SG easily  
 ‘I transport easily’ (said by a suitcase in an advertisement). [Zribi-Hertz, 1982]



- (37) a. El vole/ voeva/ voria/ vorà magnà. (Basso Polesano)  
 3MSG.NOM wants/ wanted.IPFV/ want.PRS.COND/ want.FUT eaten  
 ‘It has/had/would have/will have to be eaten.’
- b. \*El ga volesto magnà.  
 3MSG.NOM has wanted eaten  
 ‘It has had to be eaten.’
- c. \*El podaria voler magnà./ \*Volendo magnà, . . . .  
 3MSG.NOM could want eaten./ Wanting eaten  
 ‘It could have needed to be eaten./ Having to be eaten, . . .’  
 [Berizzi and Rossi, 2011, 44]

#### 1.4.4. Object promotion and subject properties

The classical cases of object promotion in canonical passive constructions involve visible surface properties associated with the subject such as word order, agreement and case-marking. The English *be*-passive in (38) displays all three properties with the pronoun *they* in preverbal position triggering number agreement on the verb:

- (38) a. He saw **them**.  
 b. **They** were seen.

However, as is well-documented in the literature, the grammatical properties associated with subjects are not cross-linguistically uniform. Keenan [1976, 312] proposes a cluster approach to the definition of SUBJECT as a multifactorial notion and proposes a range of pragmatic, semantic and syntactic properties that are commonly associated with subjects cross-linguistically. Among the properties that Keenan identifies as sensitive to grammatical subject status are the following:

- (39) Properties of subjects Keenan [1976, 315-320]
- a. **coding properties**
- (i) case marking
  - (ii) subject-agreement on the predicate
  - (iii) word order

b. **behavioral properties**

- (i) subjects can control binding of reflexives
- (ii) subjects can be zero in control constructions
- (iii) subjects can be omitted in coordinations  
John<sub>i</sub> talked to Bill<sub>j</sub> for a while and then [<sub>i,\*j</sub>] left.
- (iv) NPs which can be relativised, questioned and clefted include subjects
- (v) NPs which launch floating quantifiers include subjects

As a noun phrase can satisfy a greater or lesser number of subject properties, syntactic promotion of the logical object to subject can be partial, with the logical object exhibiting only part of the coding properties associated with grammatical subjects, following the hierarchy in (40) [Keenan, 1975].

(40) case-marking > pronominal agreement > word-order

As shown in section 1.4.1, backgrounding of the logical subject does not necessarily imply promotion of the logical object to grammatical subject in non-promotional passives. In the discussion so far, lack of subject coding properties regarding agreement, case-marking and word-order were taken as arguments for an analysis as a non-promotional passive.

However, given the cluster of properties associated with subjects in (39), a construction may manifest properties of object promotion to grammatical subject other than the coding-properties in (39)-a. Several studies in the literature confirm that lack of subject-coding properties regarding case-marking and subject-agreement are not sufficient to exclude syntactic promotion to subject of the DP.

Zaenen et al. [1985] argue in detail that Icelandic auxiliary passives of verbs with inherently case-marked objects as in (41) have QUIRKY SUBJECTS that lack the characteristic coding properties of subjects but pattern syntactically with subjects of active transitive verbs.

(41) a. Honum hvar hjálpað (Icelandic)  
him(DAT) was helped.  
[Zaenen et al., 1985, 442, ex(1)] (cf. *hann* ‘he.NOM’)

- b. þeim hvar hjálpað  
 them(DAT) was helped.  
 [Zaenen et al., 1985, 455, ex(11a)]

In the Icelandic auxiliary passive the inherently case-marked objects do not fulfill the nominative case-marking and subject-agreement properties of subjects of transitive verbs with accusative objects (41)-b, but clearly pattern with subjects on a range of other properties. In particular, like nominative subjects, the oblique subjects of the passive in (41) allow subject-to-object raising, reflexive binding, subject-verb inversion [Zaenen et al., 1985, 455-6, exx 30, 31, 32] and they can be the implicit subject of infinitives, be it controlled (42)-a or arbitrary (42)-b.

- (42) a. Ég vonast til [að verða hjálpað]. (Icelandic)  
 I hope for to be helped  
 b. [Að vera hjálpað] í prófinu er óleyfilegt.  
 to be helped on the-exam is un-allowed.  
 [Zaenen et al., 1985, 457, ex 36]

A second example of syntactic object promotion without the presence of subject-coding properties is provided by the Ukrainian *-no/-to* construction in (43)-a (see Billings and Maling 1995, Lavine [2005] and literature cited there). This construction demotes the underlying subject, conforming to the semantic profile of the passive, but leaves the logical object *cerkvu* ‘church.ACC’ marked for accusative case; in addition there is no agreement of the accusative DP with the verb-form. With respect to its coding properties regarding agreement and case-marking, the logical object does not pattern with the coding properties of transitive subjects, contrasting with the agreeing passive in Ukrainian (43)-b.

- (43) a. **Cerkvu** (bulo) zbudovano v 1640 roc’i (Lesevym).  
 church.F.ACC was.NEUT built.IMP in 1640 year Lesiv.INST  
 (Ukrainian)  
 ‘There was built a church in 1640 by Lesiv.’  
 b. **Cerkva** bula zbudovana v 1640 roc’i (Lesevym).  
 church.F.NOM was.FSG built.FSG in 1640 year Lesiv.INST  
 ‘The church was built in 1640 by Lesiv.’ [Sobin, 1985, 653-658]

However, despite case-marking in the accusative on the logical object, the Ukrainian *-no/-to* construction has syntactic properties characteristic of passives. Like the agreeing passives, the Ukrainian *-no/-to* construction allows the oblique expression of an agent in the instrumental (*Lesevym* Lesiv.INST' in (43)-a), and does not allow unaccusative (non-agentive) verbs like *die*, *drown* [Lavine, 2005, ex. (14)]. In addition, the accusative-marked logical object DP syntactically patterns with subjects of transitive verbs in Ukrainian in that (i) it is in pre-verbal position in unmarked word order and (ii) it binds reflexives in adjunct PPs.<sup>15</sup>

Particularly complex patterns are observed for Western Austronesian languages where properties like relativisation and omission in coordination are variably associated with agentive arguments or topics with a wide range of variation across different Austronesian languages (see Shibatani [2021] for detailed discussion, and section 1.6.5 for further references on passive and undergoer voice).

In summary, the analysis of a construction as involving object promotion to subject may be indicated by morphological clues like case-marking and subject-predicate-agreement, however, absence of morphological clues is not sufficient to exclude promotion to subject as grammatical subject properties can be manifested in behavioral properties associated with the promoted DP (39)-b.

## 1.5. Passive and subject demotion

The definition of canonical passive constructions in (1) requires that the demoted subject of a passive is left unexpressed or expressed by a syntactic adjunct (the AGENT PHRASE).<sup>16</sup> As syntactic adjuncts are optional, agent phrases

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<sup>15</sup>The Ukrainian *-no/-to*-construction clearly contrasts with the cognate construction in Polish patterns with constructions involving an impersonal subject and in which the accusative logical object behaves as a grammatical object, see Billings and Maling 1995, Lavine 2005.

<sup>16</sup>The syntactic constituent expressing the demoted subject will be referred to as the AGENT PHRASE, even though strictly speaking the demoted subject need not be an agent and can be a cause [Keenan and Dryer, 2006, 342], see e.g. (49)-b.

in passives are optional and therefore not an intrinsic part of passive constructions.

Section 1.5.1 provides evidence that the analysis of the morphology on agent phrases as peripheral to the passive construction is essentially correct. In particular, in passive constructions that allow agent phrases the agent phrase can be omitted. However, there are constructions that share properties with passives except that agent phrases are obligatory. The competing analyses proposed for these constructions are discussed in section 1.5.3.

Passive constructions can also display syntactic and semantic restrictions on the demoted subject 1.5.2.

### 1.5.1. Marking of the demoted subject

The demoted subject is removed from the arguments of the passivised predicate and – in a subset of passive constructions – can be optionally expressed by an adjunct. In contrast with the passive marking on the verb, the morphology marking the demoted subject is generally not considered a central part of the passive construction. Firstly, the expression of the demoted subject is typically optional and may be omitted. Secondly, the grammatical marking of the adjunct is variable, even when comparing closely related languages. Thirdly, the syntactic marking of the agent phrase is typically not restricted to the passive construction: on the one hand agent phrases may appear outside the passive construction and on the other hand the marking of agent phrases serves other grammatical functions as well. And finally, languages may have more than one morphological marking depending on the semantics of the demoted logical subject.

The morphological expression of agent phrases is variable cross-linguistically. Across Bantu, e.g. agent phrases can be marked by comitative instrumentals (44)-a, locatives (44)-b, instrumentals (44)-c, copulas (44)-d, and also appear without marking (44)-e Fleisch [2005, 96].

- (44) a. **Comitative Instrumental:** ‘sth is done WITH agent’  
a- me- pig -u -a **na** wa-tu (Swahili)  
3SG PERF beat PASS FV COM 2-people  
‘He has been beaten by the people.’

- [Fleisch, 2005, 97, ex (2)]
- b. **Locative:** ‘sth is done AT agent’
- u.aka- jayig w- a a.Joni (Tonga)  
 3SG.REM.PST kill PASS FV 16.John  
 ‘He was killed by John.’  
 [Fleisch, 2005, 101, ex (13a) citing Ashton et al 1954:337] (class  
 16 = locative class)
- c. **Instrumental:** ‘sth is done BY MEANS OF agent’
- ma.fhi a.do- nw- iw- a nga tshi.mange (Venda)  
 6.milk 6.FUT drink PASS FV INSTR 7.cat  
 ‘The milk will be drunk by the cat.’  
 [Fleisch, 2005, 99, ex (9a) citing Poulos 1999:173-174]
- d. **Copula:** ‘sth is done IT IS agent’
- in.qwelo y.a-tsal-w-a nga-ama.hashe/ yi-in.kabi(Xhosa)  
 9.wagon 9.PST-draw-PASS-FV COP-6.horse COP-9.ox  
 ‘The wagon is drawn by horses / by an ox.’  
 [Fleisch, 2005, 100, ex (11) citing McLaren 1955:100-102 ]
- e. **Without marking:** ‘sth is done agent’
- y.a- kub- ibw- a Mukasa (Luganda)  
 3SG.PST strike PASS FV Mukasa  
 ‘He was struck by Mukasa.’  
 [Fleisch, 2005, 101, ex (13a) citing Ashton et al 1954:337]

Comitative, locative and instrumental marking on agent phrases can also be expressed by case-marking (e.g. instrumental case in Ukrainian (43)-a, ablative in Kayardild (54)-a) and prepositions (ablative and instrumental prepositions in Southern Hokkaido Ainu (55)). Other morphological strategies include marking that is identical with adnominal possessors, as e.g. the genitive as in Lithuanian (45).

(45) Genitive case

Lang-as (yra) atveria-m-as (Petr-o) (Lithuanian)  
 window-NOM be.3.PRS open-PR.PASS-NOM P.-GEN

‘The window is [being] opened (by Peter).’

[Genušienė, 2006, 30, ex 1b]

The marking found on oblique agent phrases is typically not specific to either the passive construction or to agent phrases. The morphology in (44)-a/b/c and (45) also appears in other contexts, marking comitative, instrumental, locative and grammatical relations more generally.

- (46) a. a- me- rudi **na** rafiki yake (Swahili)  
3SUBJ PERF- return COM 9.friend 9.his  
‘He has returned with a friend.’ [Fleisch, 2005, 97, ex (3)]  
(active V + comitative *na*)
- b. He travelled **by** air.  
(active V + *by* + means of transport)

The agent phrase is not necessarily limited to the passive construction. In Spanish the agentive *por*-phrase can be found in participial adjectives (47)-a, adjectives suffixed by *-ble* (47)-b and certain nominalizations (47)-c, compare (48) where *by* marks an agent phrase of an active *-ing* nominalisation.

- (47) a. una ciudad rodeada **por** montañas (Spanish)  
a city surrounded by mountains
- b. los gastos asumibles **por** la empresa  
the expenses assume-able by the firm
- c. la supresión de las libertades **por** el dictador  
the suppression of the freedoms by the dictator  
[Real Academia de la Lengua Española, 2009, 3052]
- (48) The university forbids talking **by** students during exams.  
(nominalisation + *by* + agent) [Keenan and Dryer, 2006, 343, ex. 36a]

Within a single language a passive construction may allow more than one type of agent phrase. In the German *werden*-passive, for example, the agent phrase can be introduced by *von* ‘by, from’ or *durch* ‘through’, where *von* indicates an agent that controls the action (49)-a while *durch* is associated with causes that lack control over the action (49)-b [Höhle, 1978].

- (49) a. Die Stadt wurde **von** den Belagerern  
 the city AUX.PASS.PST.3SG by the besiegers  
 zerstört. (German)  
 destroyed  
 ‘The city was destroyed by the besieging forces.’  
 (logical subject controls the action)
- b. Das Schloss wurde **durch** ein Feuer zerstört.  
 the castle AUX.PASS.PST.3SG through a fire destroyed  
 ‘The castle was destroyed by a fire.’  
 (logical subject does not control the action)

## 1.5.2. Referential properties of the demoted subject

The referential properties of the demoted subject play a role in different aspects of the passive construction. The type of demoted subject may limit the availability of a passive construction and the availability of agent phrases. In addition, the implicit agent is often interpreted as human by default

An example of a passive construction that is restricted to 3rd person demoted subjects is the Balinese *a*-passive (50)-a vs. (50)-b [Arka, 2008].

- (50) a. Bli Man nyidaang masih tepuk-a **teken Made Arini**  
 Brother M. can still see-PASS by M.A.  
 (Balinese)  
 ‘Brother Man can still be seen by Made Arini.’
- b. \*Bli Man nyidaang masih tepuk-a **teken tiang**  
 Brother M. can still see-PASS by I  
 Not: ‘Brother Man can still be seen by me.’ [Arka, 2008, 81, exx 21b/c]

In the absence of an agent phrase, often the default interpretation of the implicit agent is human. In Finnish, where no agent phrase is allowed, the human interpretation cannot be overridden: according to Kiparsky [2013, 29], (51) cannot refer to an event where someone is killed by a bear:



- (51) Hänet tapettiin. (Finnish)  
 him.ACC was killed  
 ‘He was killed’ [Kiparsky, 2013, 29, ex 77]

Demoted subjects in agent phrases are subject to restrictions with respect to the referential status of the agent following the REVERSE EMPATHY HIERARCHY [Shibatani, 1998].

- (52) REVERSE EMPATHY HIERARCHY [Shibatani, 1998, 108, 46b]  
 natural force > instrument > institution > generic human > specific human > 3rd person > Speech Act Participants

In Spanish, for example, reflexive passives allow agent phrases referring to institutions (53)-a, but not to specific individuals(53)-b.

- (53) a. Se dictará sentencia por el tribunal. (Spanish)  
 REFL dictate.FUT.3SG sentence by the tribunal  
 ‘The sentence will be pronounced by the tribunal.’ [Real Academia de la Lengua Española, 2009, 3090]
- b. Se dictará sentencia \*por mí/ \*por tí / \*por Juan / \*por este juez.  
 REFL dictate.FUT.3SG sentence by me/ by you.SG / by Juan / by this judge

In earlier stages of Italian, agent phrases were possible with reflexive passives [Sansò, 2011]. Sansò [2011] observes that the specific agent phrases like *da Alessandro* ‘by Alexander’ disappeared more quickly than generic agent phrases *da tutti* ‘by all’.

The referential properties of the demoted subject can be reflected in the marking of the agent phrase. The choice between the prepositions *von* ‘from, by’ and *durch* ‘through’ in German (49) distinguishes between demoted subjects that are in control of the event and those that are not. Another contrast marked on agent phrases is the difference between human and non-human demoted subjects. In Kayardild the morphology on the agent phrase distinguishes human and non-human demoted subjects (Evans 1995: 350): human agent phrases appear in the ablative (54)-a while non-human agents appear in the verbal allative or a modal case (54)-b. And in Southern Hokkaido Ainu the

agent phrase is marked by an ablative postposition with animate agents and by an instrumental postposition with inanimate agents [Siewierska, 2012].

- (54) a. Ngada ra-yii-ju mun-da balarr-**inja** maku-**nth**  
 1SG-NOM spear-MV-POT buttock-NOM white-ABL woman-ABL  
 (Kayardild)  
 ‘I will be injected in the buttocks by the white woman.’
- b. Nying-ka ra-yii-nyarra kurdalalng-**kiiwa**-nharr  
 2SG-NOM spear-MV-APPR stingray-VALL-APPR  
 /kamarr-**inj**  
 /stonefish-M-OBL  
 ‘You might get stung by a stingray.’ [Evans, 1995, 350-351]  
 APPR = apprehensive, M-OBL = modal oblique, MV = middle voice, POT = potential, VALL = verbal allative
- (55) a. Hapo or-o **wa** a=en=koyki (Southern  
 mother place-POSS **from** INDF:A=1SGP=abuse  
 Hokkaido Ainu)  
 ‘I was scolded by my mother.’
- b. Rera **ani** cikuni a=Ø=kekke  
 wind **by** tree INDF:A=3P=break  
 ‘The tree was broken by the wind.’  
 [Siewierska, 2012, 182, ex (39) citing Anna Bugaeva, p.c.]

In summary, passive constructions can be limited to certain types of agents, and referential properties of the demoted subject condition the availability and the morphological coding properties of agent phrases.

### 1.5.3. Optionality of the demoted subject

The study of optionality of the demoted subject in passives in the literature focuses on two aspects:

- (56) a. The unmarked status of passives without agent phrases (Keenan’s notion of the *basic passive*)

- b. The optionality of the agent phrase as a definitional property of passives.

In Keenan (1985) the absence of the agent phrase is part of the definition of the basic passive, that he takes to be the cross-linguistically most frequent passives. Siewierska [2012, 159-] examines the frequency of the expression of the demoted subject in passives in detail. She notes that the frequency of the agent phrase in the passive (see definition (4)) can be interpreted at two levels:

- (57)
- a. Possibility of agent phrases in passive constructions
  - b. Frequency of expression of overt agent phrases (in passives that allow them)

In Siewierska's sample of 264 languages for which information on expressibility of the agent was available, 171 passives allow expression of the agent while 93 do not [Siewierska, 2012, 159]: there are more passive constructions that allow oblique expression of the agent than passives that ban it.

At the language-internal level, data about frequency of the expression of agent phrases is not widely available. In the majority of the small sample of languages for which there are frequency data, passives without an overt agent are more frequent language-internally than passives with overt agent phrases [Siewierska, 2012, 160].

However, as pointed out by Siewierska [2012, 175], optionality of the agent phrase need not be a property of every instance of the passive construction. In languages that allow passives of verbs with low transitivity – with participants neither in control nor affected by the action – the agent phrase with passives of this type of verbs may be obligatory:

- (58)
- a. The coffee was followed/preceded **\*(by a culinary surprise)**.
  - b. On her death she was succeeded **\*(by the Duke of York)**.  
[Siewierska, 2012, 175, ex 29a/c]<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>As Brenda Laca, p.c., points out, this may be due to the fact that these verbs express relations not mediated by an event.

- (59) Marken agde-s           fortfarande \*(**av Danviks hospital**) (Swedish)  
ground owned-PASS still           by Danvik hospital  
'The ground was still owned by the Danvik hospital.' (Engdahl 2006:  
33) [Siewierska, 2012, 175, ex 30]
- (60) La película fue interpretada  
the film       was INTERPRET.PTCP  
\*(**por Jorge Negrete y María Félix.**) (Spanish)  
by J. N. and M. F.  
'The film had J.N. and M. F. as stars.' lit. 'The film was acted in  
by Jorge Negrete and María Félix.' [Real Academia de la Lengua  
Española, 2009, 3052]

The examples in (59) and (60) concern instances of the passive for which the agent phrase is obligatory. The verbs are relational verbs for which the distinctive information in the example is provided by the agent phrase.<sup>18</sup>

At the level of the passive construction, it has been debated whether optionality of the demoted subject should be included as part of the definition of passives as in the definition of the canonical passive.

Obligatory expression of the agent has played a central role in the debate surrounding the analysis of subject demoting constructions in Austronesian languages (see section 1.6.5 for discussion of the Acehnese subject demoting construction, Lawler [1977] and the subsequent literature).

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<sup>18</sup>The obligatory nature of the agent phrase may depend on the context. In (i)-a the agent cannot be omitted [Real Academia de la Lengua Española, 2009, 3052]. However, in a context in which the quality of periods of directorship are compared it is possible to omit the agent phrase as in (i)-b.

- a.       a.   La Staatsoper de Berlín fue dirigida por Karajan durante seis años.  
          the state-opera of Berlin was directed by K.       for       6   years  
          'The Staatsoper in Berlin was directed by Karajan for six years.' [Real  
          Academia de la Lengua Española, 2009, 3052]
- b.   La Staatsoper de Berlín fue dirigida magistralmente durante esos seis años.  
          the state-opera of Berlin was directed masterfully during those 6 years  
          'The Staatsoper in Berlin was directed masterfully during those six years.'

Arka and Kosmas 2005 argue in detail that the construction in Manggarai exemplified in (61)-b is best analysed as a passive construction. The construction differs from a canonical passive however, in that it relies on the same verb form as the active construction and its demoted agent is obligatory. The authors provide evidence that in (61)-b the logical object is promoted to syntactic subject and the logical subject is demoted and expressed as an oblique.

- (61) a. Aku cero latung=k. (Manggarai)  
 1SG fry corn-1SG  
 ‘I fry/am frying corn.’  
 b. Latung hitu cero l=aku=i.  
 corn that fry by=1SG=3SG  
 ‘The corn is (being) fried by me.’ [Arka and Kosmas, 2005, 95]

Like a subject, the preverbal logical object NP *latung* ‘corn’ controls agreement on the 3sg enclitic (*-i* in (61)-b) [Arka and Kosmas, 2005, 95]. Furthermore, the logical object appears as the controlled argument in control constructions and patterns with subjects for relativisation [Arka and Kosmas, 2005, 98-99]. At the same time, the agent phrase introduced by *le/l=* behaves like an adjunct in that it can appear in different structural positions [Arka and Kosmas, 2005, 96] and it behaves as a non-core argument for reflexive binding [Arka and Kosmas, 2005, 100].

Notice that optionality of the agent phrase cannot be straightforwardly deduced from the fact that a language permits string identical passive constructions with and without an agent phrase. For example, Mandarin has two passive constructions marked with *bei*, diachronically related to a verb meaning *suffer*: (62)-b with an expressed agent and (62)-c without an agent [Huang et al., 2009]:

- (62) a. Lisi da-le Zhangsan (Mandarin Chinese)  
 L. hit-LE Z.  
 ‘Lisi hit Zhangsan.’ (active)  
 b. Zhangsan bei Lisi da-le.  
 c. Zhangsan bei da-le.  
 Zhangsan bei Lisi hit-le

‘Zhangsan was hit (by Lisi).’ [Huang et al., 2009, 113, exx (1) & (2)]

Huang et al. [2009, 112] argue in detail that (62)-b/c should not be viewed as instances of a single passive construction with an optional agent, but as two constructions that are not derivationally related (for differing analyses see references in Huang et al. 2009).

In summary, optionality of the agent phrase expressed as an adjunct is the most common case for passive constructions cross-linguistically. However, passive constructions may have instances in which the agent phrase is obligatory, and agent-demoting constructions in which agent phrases that are obligatorily expressed do not preclude a passive analysis. Finally, the existence of two constructions with and without the agent NP is not generally sufficient to infer the existence of a single construction with an optional agent phrase.

## 1.6. Passive morphology

Passive constructions are defined as constructions presenting a characteristic combination of semantic and syntactic properties. Sections 1.4 and 1.5 reviewed variation between passive constructions concerning the restrictions associated with object promotion and subject demotion respectively.

Passive constructions also vary with respect to their morphological marking. Diachronic sources of passive morphology include participles, auxiliaries, reflexives, 3pl subject constructions, and undergoer voice.

As is well-known, a language may have more than one passive construction. In this case the passive constructions can differ with respect to their grammatical properties. Spanish, for example, has an auxiliary+participle passive and a reflexive passive, and the two constructions differ with respect to the availability of passives of intransitives, the possibility of 1st and 2nd person promoted objects and the availability of agent phrases.

The morphological marking of passive constructions includes synthetic forms with passive marking on the verb stem or peripheral to the verb and periphrastic marking combining a passive auxiliary with a form of the main verb.

### 1.6.1. Passive morphology on the verb stem

Passive morphology can occur directly on the verb stem as a suffix in (63)-a from Tswana (Bantu), an infix in (63)-b from Chamorro (Austronesian) or separated from the stem by some agreement morphology as in Ute (Uto-Aztecan) (63)-c.

- (63) a. *lò-kwáló*            *ʼlú-tʰáà-kwál-w-à*            *kí ò:ná* (Tswana)  
 SG-letter(CL11) I<sub>s/A</sub>:CL11-FUT-write-PASS-FV by 1SG  
 ‘The letter will be written by me.’ [Creissels, ms, ch9, ex. 1b]
- b. *K-in-assi*            *si*    *Kindu’* *as*    *Kika’*. (Chamorro)  
 AGR.PASS.tease UNM Kindu’ OBL Kika’  
 ‘Kindu’ was teased by Kika’.’ [Chung, 2020, ch 10, ex 2]
- c. *tukuavi*    *tuka-ta-puga* / *tukuavi*    *tuka-qha-ta-puga* (Ute)  
 meat.OBJ eat-PASS-REM / meat.OBJ eat-PL-PASS-REM  
 ‘The meat was eaten / The meat was eaten (by many).’ [Givón, 2011, 250, ex 40f/41]

The examples in (63) mark passive by affixation. Passive can also be indicated by stem modification as e.g. in Omani Mehri (South Arabian) (64), or Kaqchikel (Maya) (65) [Broadwell and Duncan, 2002].

- (64) *ktūb* ‘he wrote’ vs. *ktēb* ‘sth was written’ (Omani Mehri)  
 [Rubin, 2018, 120-121]
- (65) a. *Ri achin x-u-ch’äy*            *ri tz’i’* (Kaqchikel; Maya)  
 the man COM-3SGA-3SGE-hit the dog  
 ‘The man hit the dog.’
- b. *Ri tz’i’ x-ch’ay*            *r-oma’*    *ri achin*  
 the dog COM-hit:PASS 3SGE-by the man  
 ‘The dog was hit by the man.’ [Broadwell and Duncan, 2002, 28, exx 6/7]

Passive morphemes may be cognate with causative morphology (see Creissels 2021, ch 9 and references for a detailed discussion of the link between causative and passive constructions). This relationship between causatives and passives is also found for passive auxiliaries (see Section 1.6.3.2).

- (66) a. I bata-be va-**bu**-ha. (Manchu; Tungusic)  
 3SG enemy-ACC kill-CAUS-PST  
 ‘He made (somebody) kill the enemy.’ (causative)
- b. I (bata-de) va-**bu**-ha.  
 3SG (enemy-DAT ) kill-CAUS-PST  
 ‘He is/was killed (by the enemy).’ (passive) [Creissels, 2021, ch9,  
 citing Nedjalkov 1993:194]

A special case of passive morphology on the verb is marking by a dedicated set of subject agreement markers [Haspelmath, 1990, 30], as e.g. in the imperfective tenses of the passive in Latin (67)-a. Latin further shows that passive marking need not be uniform across the paradigm. In the perfect tenses the Latin passive was expressed by a periphrastic construction (66)-b with the past participle and the imperfective form of the auxiliary *esse*.<sup>19</sup>

- (67) a. Latin imperfective passive

PRESENT	IMPERFECTIVE PAST	FUTURE
amatur	amābātur	amābitur
love.PRS.PASS3SG	love.IPFV.PST.PASS3SG	love.FUT.PASS3SG
‘s/he is loved’	‘s/he was loved.IPFV’	s/he will be loved

b. Latin perfect passive:

PERFECT PAST	PLUPERFECT	FUTURE PERFECT
amatus <b>est</b>	amatus <b>erat</b>	amatus <b>erit</b>
loved.PST.PTCP be. <b>prs.</b> 3SG	be. <b>ipfv.pst</b> 3SG	be. <b>fut.</b> 3SG
‘s/he was loved.PFV’	‘s/he had been loved’	s/he will have been loved

<sup>19</sup>In the Latin perfect passive perfect aspect was encoded on the participle while tense was encoded on the auxiliary. It was only with the loss of the synthetic imperfective passive forms in the transition to Romance that perfect forms of the auxiliary became available in the passive with the expression of aspect shifting from the participle to the auxiliary [Cennamo, 2006, 316].



## 1.6.2. Reflexive passives

A common source of passive morphology are reflexive constructions (Haspelmath 1990, Kemmer 1993) as illustrated by the *--sja* suffix in Russian (68)-a and the *-s* suffix in Swedish (68)-b. The connection between passives and reflexives has its origin in middle voice that includes readings in which the event described by the verb affects the subject, ranging from reflexives, reciprocals, autobenefactives, anticausatives, to passives (Genušienė 1987, Kemmer 1993).

- (68) a. Problema            obsuzhdaet-sja    specialistami (Russian)  
          problem.SG.NOM discuss.3SG-REFL specialist.PL.INSTR  
          ‘The problem is being discussed by specialists.’
- b. På den tiden tala-de-s    franska vid hovet.    (Swedish)  
          at that time speak-PST-S French at the.court  
          ‘At that time French was spoken at the court.’

Grammaticalised reflexive passive markers like *-s* in Scandinavian may differ from synchronic reflexives in their agreement properties: while reflexive pronouns agree in person and number the *-s* suffix is invariable [Haspelmath, 1990, 29].

Languages that have more than one passive construction may display semantic restrictions on the choice of passive. In Norwegian and Danish, for example, the *s*-passive that derives from a reflexive is used for types of events (69)-a while the auxiliary passive is used for particular events (69)-b.

- (69) a. Oppgavene leveres    hver uke. (Norwegian)  
          the.exercises hand-s in every week  
          ‘The exercises are normally handed in every week.’
- b. Oppgaven ble            levert        for seint.  
          the.exercise PASS.AUX handed in too late  
          ‘The exercise was handed in too late.’ [Engdahl, 2006, 25, 9a/b]

As shown in (35), reflexive passives can be restricted to 3rd person logical objects, as e.g. in Romance. For Romance the grammaticalisation of reflexive passives has been studied in great detail and a number of restrictions on the types of verbs and availability of compound tenses with the reflexive passive have been observed. Cennamo [2014] shows that e.g. in Old Venetian the re-

flexive passive was first limited to simple tenses and transitive verbs and only later permitted periphrastic tenses and intransitive verbs.

In summary, in some languages, reflexive passives can be productive but still restricted in their distribution by the person marking (3rd person only), in their interpretation (types of events as opposed to particular events) and in the types of tenses they combine with (simple vs. periphrastic).

### 1.6.3. Passive periphrases

Another common morphological form marking passive constructions are passive periphrases combining a form of the main verb with an auxiliary. A particularly common source of passive periphrases are resultative constructions with non-finite verb forms (section 1.6.3.1).

The grammars of well-studied languages like English or the Romance languages tend to focus on the most grammaticalised passive periphrases Engl. *be* + past participle, Fr. *être* + past participle. The highly grammaticalised periphrases have few grammatical restrictions on the type of verb they can apply to and on the range of tense-aspect marking they combine with. In addition, grammaticalised passive periphrases do not add additional semantic content.

However, languages may have other, less grammaticalised auxiliary-constructions that convey a passive meaning in addition to other semantic meaning such as negative effect on the patient, surprise or deontic modality (section 1.6.3.2).

#### 1.6.3.1. Passives and non-finite forms

The source of the subject demotion and object promotion in a passive periphrasis can be associated with the form of the main verb, as e.g. in constructions with a passive participle (70), or on the auxiliary as e.g. in the deontic passive construction with *want* (70)-b.

- (70) a. The house was destroyed by a storm.  
b. This car wants washing.  
‘This car needs to be washed.’

Non-finite forms of the verb that express the result of the event are not strictly

passive. In adnominal uses the participles of English, e.g. can be resultative without implying an agent of the event and adnominal participles are also possible for unaccusative verbs [Haspelmath, 1990, 40, citing Jespersen 1940]. Evidence that resultative participles are the source of the passive reading comes from uses of the passive in absolute clauses (72)-a and adnominal uses implying an agent (72)-b.

- (71) a. a dried cherry  
 b. an escaped prisoner
- (72) a. Une fois rempli, le formulaire doit être  
 one time fill-in.PTCP the form has-to.3SG be.INF  
 envoyé à l'adresse suivante. (French)  
 sent.PTCP to the-address following.3FSG  
 'Once filled in, the form has to be sent to the following address.'  
 b. le formulaire rempli  
 DET form filled-in.PTCP.3MSG  
 'the filled-in form'

The passive auxiliary contributes an eventive interpretation to the resultative verb form: in German the resultative participle in combination with the copula *sein* introduces a stative reading (73)-a while the passive auxiliary *werden* adds an eventive interpretation (73)-b.

- (73) a. Die Badewanne ist gefüllt.  
 DET bathtub is fill.PTCP  
 'The bathtub is filled (= full).' [result of filling in the past]  
 b. Die Badewanne wird gefüllt.  
 DET bathtub AUX.PASS.3SG fill.PTCP  
 'The bathtub is being filled.' [result of filling in the future, implicit agent]

### 1.6.3.2. Passive auxiliaries

Languages can have more than one auxiliary passive. The different passive auxiliaries can differ with respect to their grammatical properties. The passive

auxiliary can contribute semantic nuances such as surprise, empathy, deontic modality, syntactically the auxiliaries may differ in whether they promote the direct object or the indirect object and morphologically auxiliaries may differ in the range of tense-aspect and person-number marking they combine with.

Passive auxiliaries grammaticalise from a range of verbs. In Indo-European languages passive auxiliaries meaning *be*, *become*, *stay*, *come*, *go* are documented (Siewierska 1984, Haspelmath 1990, 38).<sup>20</sup>

The first class of auxiliaries identified by [Keenan and Dryer, 2006, 336] are verbs of being or becoming illustrated by the English be-passive (70)-a and the German *werden* ‘become’ passive (73)-b.

The second type of passive auxiliaries derives from verbs of reception *get*, *receive* Keenan and Dryer [2006, 337] such as German *kriegen* ‘get’ (26) and the Welsh passive in (74).

- (74) Cafodd Wyn ei rybuddio gan Ifor (Welsh)  
 get Wyn his warning by Ifor

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<sup>20</sup>The auxiliary and the cognate copula use need not be analysed as a single verb synchronically. In German, the copula *werden* does not imply agentivity: with adjectives the reading is anti-causative and the participle of the copula is *geworden* (i). In contrast, with verbal participles, *werden* ‘become’ contrasts with *sein* ‘be’ in that *sein*+participle is stative while *werden*+participle is agentive, and the participle of the passive auxiliary is *worden* (ii)

- (i) a. Kim wird rot b. Kim ist rot **geworden** (German)  
 Kim become.PRS.3SG red Kim is red become.PTCP  
 ‘Kim is blushing / Kim blushed’
- (ii) a. Die Kleider sind gewaschen./ b. Die Kleider werden  
 the clothes be.PRS3PL washed/ the clothes PASS.AUX.PRS.3PL  
 gewaschen. (German)  
 washed.  
 ‘The clothes are washed (= clean).’ / ‘The clothes are being washed.’
- c. Die Kleider sind gewaschen **worden**.  
 the clothes are wash.PTCP PASS.AUX.PTCP

See Siewierska [1984, ch 4] for discussion of different structures associated with passive auxiliaries.

‘Wyn was warned by Ifor’ [Keenan and Dryer, 2006, 337,ex 25]

The third class of passive auxiliaries are derived from verbs of motion, found e.g. in Italian, Kurdish, Maithili and Kashmiri [Siewierska, 1984, 126]. Passive auxiliaries based on verbs meaning *come* are also found in other Romance languages [Giacalone Ramat and Sansò, 2014]. The *venire* ‘come’ passive and the *andare*-passives in Italian are exemplified in (75) and (76) [Giacalone Ramat and Sansò, 2014, Sansò and Giacalone Ramat, 2016]. The *venire* ‘come’-passive is subject to morphological restrictions as it is only compatible with simple tenses [Giacalone Ramat and Sansò, 2014, 22] (75)-a. Sansò and Giacalone Ramat [2016] show that Italian has two *andare* ‘go’ + past participle passive constructions: a lexically restricted non-modal passive (76)-a and a deontic passive (76)-b.

(75) I            due vennero            trascinati            via. (Italian)  
ART.M.PL two come.PST.3PL drag.PTCP.M.PL away  
‘The two were dragged off.’ [Giacalone Ramat and Sansò, 2014, 21, ex 2]

(76) a. la casa andò                    distrutta                    negli anni  
ART house go.PFV.PTCP.3SG destroy:PFV.PTCP in.ART years  
settanta (Italian)  
seventies  
‘The house got destroyed in the Seventies.’ [non-modal *andare* ‘go’ passive]

b. la domanda va                    presentata                    su carta libera  
ART application go.PRS.3SG present:PFV.PTCP on paper free  
‘The application must be done on simple paper.’ [modal *andare* ‘go’ passive] [Sansò and Giacalone Ramat, 2016, exx 8, 10]

Keenan & Dryer’s fourth class of passive auxiliaries derives from verbs of experiencing meaning *suffer*, *undergo* (see (77)). The Thai construction in (77) is associated with an adversative meaning suggesting that the logical object is suffering an unpleasant experience [Sudmuk, 2003].<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>The syntactic analysis of these constructions is debated. Keenan and Dryer [2006] suggest passives relying on verbs meaning *suffer* in Southeast Asian languages as a special case

- (77) Quang bi (Bao) ghet. (Thai)  
 Quang touch (Bao) detest  
 ‘Quang is detested (by Bao).’ (Keenan and Dryer 2007:338)

In addition to these four classes, passive auxiliaries can also arise from inactive deontic modals corresponding to *need*. Across English varieties two types of deontic passive constructions with the verbs *want*, *need* are attested: one embedding an *-ing* form (78) and another embedding a past participle (79) [Maher and Wood, 2011].

- (78) a. Your hair wants **cutting**. (needs to be cut)  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/want>  
 b. I sent the car back to the garage because it needed **fixing**.
- (79) The car needs **repaired**. [Maher and Wood, 2011]

The categorial status of the *-ing* complement of *need* shows partial characteristics of both gerund and verbal noun [Toyota, 2006, 139]: it can be modified by an adjective or an adverb, but not by a determiner:

- (80) a. This TV needs **careful** fixing.  
 b. This TV needs fixing **carefully**.  
 c. \*This TV needs a fixing. [Toyota, 2006, 139]

In the *need*+past participle constructions, negation shows that *need* does not allow modal syntax (81)-a, but behaves like a main verb, requiring do-support (81)-b [Edelstein, 2014]:

- (81) a. \*The car needn’t washed.  
 b. The car doesn’t need washed. [Edelstein, 2014]

Passive auxiliaries with a deontic meaning derived from verbs meaning *want*

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of serial verb constructions, while Sudmuk [2003] analyses the Thai construction as an unbounded dependency construction like the “Tough” construction in English as proposed by Huang for the Chinese *bei* passive (see discussion in Huang [2013]).

also exist in a range of Romance languages as in (82) (see Cabredo Hofherr 2017b for references and discussion).

- (82) La çhosse la ul fate. (Friulian)  
 the thing.3FSG NOM.3FSG wants done.FSG  
 ‘This thing has to be done/it is necessary to do this thing.’ (Salvioni 1912, in Ledgeway 2000, 244)

Finally, passive auxiliaries can also be morphologically complex. Passive constructions with the reflexive verb *see* and a past participle is found in for a variety of Romance languages. These passive auxiliaries contribute additional semantic content presenting the event as unexpected and expressing empathy on the part of the speaker (83). The *vedersi*-‘see-REFL’ construction in Italian is restricted to transitive predicates that affect the patient in an undesirable way [Giacalone Ramat, 2017]. French has a passive construction combining the reflexivised causative verb *faire* with an infinitival complement (84) [Kupferman, 1995, Labelle, 2013]. In this construction the passive auxiliary combines with an infinitive (like in the causative construction) not with a passive participle as (83).<sup>22</sup>

- (83) a. Il presidente si vide costretto a dare le dimissioni (Italian)  
 The president REFL see:PST:3SG force:PST.PTCP. to give:INF the resignation  
 ‘The president was forced/found himself forced to resign.’ [Giacalone Ramat, 2017, ex 1]
- b. Le pays s’est vu frappé par le cyclone. (French)  
 the country REFL=AUX seen hit.PTCP by the cyclone  
 ‘The country was hit by the storm.’ [Cabredo Hofherr, 2017b]
- (84) Si elle ne fait pas attention, elle **se fera**  
 if she not makes neg attention 3FSG REFL CAUSATIVE.FUT3SG  
**écraser** (par une voiture). (French)  
 run-over.INF (by a car)

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<sup>22</sup>In addition to promotion of the direct object, the REFL+ *faire*- passive in French allows promotion of the indirect object see ex. (27) in section 1.4.2.

‘If she is not careful she will get herself run over by a car.’ [Labelle, 2013, 242]

Passive auxiliaries generally derive from non-agentive verbs [Haspelmath, 1990, 38-42]. As Keenan and Dryer [2006, 338] point out, the English *get*-passive, for example, most likely derives from the inchoative use of *get* as in *John got sick*, not from the causative use in *John got Bill to come*. For passive auxiliaries derived from verbs meaning *come* and *go* (VENTIVE and ITIVE passives), the verbs undergo semantic change prior to grammaticalisation as passive auxiliaries. The Italian *venire* ‘come’, for example, diachronically develops a change of state meaning combining with adjectives before the passive construction arises [Giacalone Ramat and Sansò, 2014], for deontic passives the modal allows an impersonal modal meaning *need*~ *it is necessary that*.

#### 1.6.4. Passives and generalized subject constructions

Another major source of passive morphology are ‘generalized-subject constructions’ [Haspelmath, 1990, 49-50].

Many languages allow generalized subject constructions that background an agent with an active verbal form combined with a non-anaphoric 3pl subject (85) or non-anaphoric plural agreement as in the Lunda example (87).

- (85) a. They are having a party next door.  
b. In the afternoons, they play football in this park. Condoravdi [1989]  
c. In England, they drink tea in the afternoons.

In impersonal constructions with a 3pl subject the backgrounded agent is necessarily interpreted as human. The non-anaphoric plural pronominal subject does not change the syntax of the construction: for transitive verbs, the logical object is coded as a direct object. Siewierska [2010] observes that these unspecified subject constructions are typically event-centered, not participant centered like canonical passives. This observation is particularly clear for episodic



and existential uses of unspecified subject constructions: the episodic example (85-a) states that there is a party going on next door, while the existential use of the subject in (85-b) states that football games (with unspecified players) take place in the park. For locative-universal examples like (85-c) the event-centered nature is less straightforward: the locative is associated with an inferred group of people roughly corresponding *people associated with England* and the sentences can be understood as a claim about habits of this group.<sup>23</sup>

Generalized subject constructions may grammaticalise to display properties of passives. The grammatical changes in this grammaticalization process include compatibility with an agent phrase, the possibility of non-human implicit agents, and loss of object-coding properties of the logical object. As pointed out by Siewierska [2010], the change in information structure from an event-centered unspecified subject construction to a patient-centered passive construction is plausibly associated with a stage involving topicalisation of the logical object.

An example of a passive derived from a generalized subject construction is the Kaqchikel *ki*-passive, where *ki*- is homophonous with the 3pl ergative agreement but the *ki*-passive allows agent phrases in the singular and 1st/2nd person.

- (86) Ri b'ojoy x-ki-pax-ij                      r-oma'   rija' / q-oma'   roj /  
the pot    COM-PASS-break-TR 3SGE-by him / 1PLE-by us /  
aw-oma' rat                      (Kaqchikel)  
2SGE-by you.SG  
'The pot was broken by him/ by us/ by you.SG.' [Broadwell and Duncan, 2002, 31, exx 16,18,19]

In the early stages of grammaticalization of the general subject construction as a passive, the emerging passives are associated with grammatical restrictions. In Bantu, passive constructions derived from generalized subject-constructions have been studied in detail for a range of languages and the restrictions on the demoted agent and the extent of syntactic promotion of the logical object vary.

The Lunda (Bantu) construction with a plural human agreement prefix *a-*

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<sup>23</sup>For a classification of different generalized subject constructions see Cabredo Hofherr 2003, Siewierska and Papastathi 2011.

‘SM2’ on the verb (87)-a can be interpreted as anaphoric on a DP of class 2 (the class of human animates, corresponding to an animate 3pl) (87)-b-(i), as an indefinite subject (87)-b-(ii), or as passive (87)-b-(iii) Givón and Kawasha [2006]. The human plural subject agreement (87), allows the expression of the agent by an agent phrase that can express a plural (88)-a or singular (88)-b demoted subject [Kawasha, 2007].

- (87) a. a-tu-ánsi a-a-nat-a nyi-kabu (Lunda)  
 2-13-child SA2-TNS-throw-FV 4-fruit  
 ‘The children threw the fruits.’ [active transitive] (Kawasha 2007: 39 ex 3a)
- b. a-a-mu-mona  
 2-PST-3SG/OBJ-see  
 (i) ‘they saw him/her’ (anaphoric pl human subject)  
 (ii) ‘someone saw him/her’ (impersonal subject)  
 (iii) ‘s/he was seen’ (passive) [Givón and Kawasha, 2006, ex. 3d]
- (88) a. a-a-nat-a nyi-kabu **kúdi a-tu-ánsi** (Lunda)  
 SA2-TNS-throw-FV 4-fruit **by 2-13-child**  
 ‘The fruits were thrown by the children.’ [lit. ‘They threw the fruits by the children’]
- b. a-a-(mu-)tambik-a ka-ánsi **kúdi chi-índa**  
 SA2-TNS-(OM1-)call-FV 1-child **by 1-hunter 5-poss-1sg**  
 ‘The child was called by the hunter.’ (Kawasha 2007: 39 ex 3b/45, ex 13b/46 ex14b) [*a*-prefix with agent phrases]

The Lunda *a*-passive constructions is a non-canonical passive. When the logical object is pre-verbal, the agreement on the verb is *a*- ‘SM2’ and the preposed NP is obligatorily indexed by an object pronominal *yi* ‘OM4’ (89) [Kawasha, 2007, 46]. Compare with (89) where the inanimate logical object is in post-verbal position without an object pronominal (89)-a and the object pronominal *mu*- is optional with an animate object (89)-b.

- (89) a. nyi-kabui a-a-**yi**-nat-a kúdi a-tu-ánsi  
 4-fruit SA2-TNS-**om4**-throw-FV by 2-13-child  
 ‘The fruits were thrown by the children.’ [lit. ‘The fruits, they threw them by the children’]

- b. ka-ánsi a-a-**mu**-tambik-a      **kúdi chi-índa**  
 1-child SA2-TNS-**om1**-call-FV by    **1-hunter 5-poss-1sg**  
 ‘The child was called by the hunter.’ [lit. ‘The child, they called  
 it by the hunter.’] (Kawasha 2007: 40, ex 4, 46 ex 15) [fronted  
 logical object obligatorily indexed by object agreement marker]

While the Lunda passive may only include 3rd person human agent phrases (Givón and Kawasha 2006 see (90)), other languages like Kimbundu allow 1st person agent phrases (91) [Givón, 1976] and Kula and Marten [2010] stress that the Bemba *ba*-passive allows inanimate agent phrases (92).

- (90) a. \*a-a-mu-mona              Mari **kud-aami** (Lunda)  
 3PL-PST-3SG/OBJ-see M.    DAT-me  
 Intended: ‘Mary was seen by me’
- b. \*Mari a-a-mu-mona              kud-aami  
 M.    3PL-PST-3SG/OBJ-see DAT-me  
 Intended: ‘Mary was seen by me’ [Givón and Kawasha, 2006, ex.  
 4b/c]
- (91) a. a-mu-mono (Kimbundu)  
 3PL-3SG-saw  
 ‘They saw him.’
- b. Nzua a-mu-mono    kwa meme  
 Nzua PASS-3SG-saw by    me  
 ‘Nzua was seen by me.’ [Givón, 1976, 180]
- (92) a. bá-alí-ly-a              ífy-ákulya ku mu-mbúlu. (Bemba)  
 SC2-PST-eat-FV 7-food    by 3-wild.dog  
 ‘The food was eaten by the wild dog.’
- b. bá-alí-tób-a              ibééndé ku cii-mu-ti  
 SC2-PST-break-FV 9.bowl by 7-3-tree  
 ‘The pounding mortar was broken by the tree.’ [Kula and Marten,  
 2010, ex 4a/b]

As Kula and Marten [2010] show, the logical object of the *ba*-passive in Bemba has an intermediate status between grammatical objects and grammatical subjects: the logical object patterns with objects of transitive verbs for wh-questions [Kula and Marten, 2010, ex 8] and with subjects with respect to

the relative clause strategies it allows [Kula and Marten, 2010, ex 11].

As the data from Bantu show, passive constructions derived from generalised subject constructions can differ considerably with respect to the availability of agent phrases and the coding properties of the logical object.

### 1.6.5. Passives and undergoer voice

The status of undergoer voice constructions in Austronesian languages has been discussed in detail in the literature. In conservative Western Austronesian languages like Tagalog or Malagasy, verbal affixes indicate the semantic role of the participant functioning as the syntactic subject.

- (93) a. **b-um-ili** ng isda sa tindahan ang lalake (Tagalog)  
 VC-buy CORE fish OBL store man  
 'The man bought fish in the store.' [agent is subject]
- b. **bi-bilh-in** ng lalake sa tindahan ang isda  
 IRR-buy-VC CORE man OBL store fish  
 'The man will buy the fish in the store.' [theme is subject]
- c. **bi-bilh-an** ng lalake ng isda ang tindahan  
 IRR-buy-VC CORE man CORE fish store  
 'The man will buy fish in the store.' [location is subject]
- d. **ipam-bi-bili** ng alake ng isda ang salapi  
 VC-IRR-buy CORE man CORE fish money  
 'The man will buy fish with the money.' [instrument is subject]
- e. **i-bi-bili** ng lalake ng isda ang bata  
 VC-IRR-buy CORE man CORE fish child  
 'The man will buy fish for the child.' [benefactive is subject]  
 [Yanti et al., 2018, 21, ex. 1, citing Foley (1998)]

In Philippine-type languages, like Tagalog, in sentences with non-agent voice the agent is not demoted to adjunct and no voice is syntactically basic [Yanti et al., 2018, 20]. In addition, the voices with non-actor subjects are more frequent in texts than the actor-subjects (Keenan and Manorohanta 2001 for Malagasy, Siewierska 2012, 173). These properties make undergoer-oriented voice (also called OBJECT VOICE or OBJECTIVE VOICE) in Philippine-type languages as in (93)-b different from passive constructions in European-style languages, where active verb forms are unmarked with respect to the passive

forms. In European-style languages the active is *unmarked* in terms of verbal marking as passive constructions require additional morphological marking and also in terms of frequency as active verb forms are more frequent than verbs in passive constructions.

However, there is evidence that other Austronesian languages display a mixed system that includes both undergoer voice-marking and a passive construction, as shown by Arka and Manning [1998] for Indonesian (94)/(95), Arka [2008] for Balinese, Legate [2014, ch 3] for Acehnese and Yanti et al. [2018] for Malayic.

(94) Di-Passive (agent demoted to adjunct or omitted)

- a. buku itu sudah di-baca (Adapted from Arka & Manning  
book that PFCT PASS-read  
1998:10) (Indonesian)  
  
‘That book has been read.’
- b. buku itu sudah di-baca oleh Ali  
book that PFCT PASS-read by ali  
‘That book has been read by Ali.’
- c. buku itu sudah di-baca **Ali**  
book that PFCT PASS-read ali  
‘That book has been read by Ali.’ [Yanti et al., 2018, 23, ex 6]

(95) Undergoer Voice (agent not demoted to adjunct)

buku itu sudah **aku** baca (Indonesian)  
book that PFCT 1SG read

‘I have read that book.’ [Yanti et al., 2018, 23, ex 7]

In the Indonesian *di*-passive the actor is optional and expressed post-verbally (94)-b/c. In contrast, in the undergoer voice, the actor is obligatory, and appears in pre-verbal position with the undergoer argument preceding the actor (95). Arka and Manning [1998] show that the actor in the *di*-passive cannot bind a reflexive undergoer (96)-a, contrasting with the actor in the undergoer voice which can bind the reflexive undergoer (96)-b (Yanti et al. 2018, 25-27 discuss further evidence from nominalization).

- (96) a. ?\*Dirinya di-serahkan ke Polisi oleh Amir (Indonesian)  
 SELF.3 PASS-surrender to police by A.  
 ‘Himself was surrendered to the police by Amir. [*di*-passive, refl binding \*] [Arka and Manning, 1998, ex 6a]
- b. diri saya yang saya serahkan ke polisi  
 SELF.1 REL 1SG surrender to police  
 ‘It is myself that I surrendered to the police.’ [undergoer voice, refl binding ok] [Arka and Manning, 1998, ex 17a]

Arka [2008] and Yanti et al. 2018, 27-30 give evidence that undergoer voice constructions (with core-argument actors) can grammaticalise to become passive constructions (with adjunct oblique actors). Arka [2008] argues that Balinese has an undergoer voice and two passive constructions, one of which is homophonous with the undergoer voice with a 3rd person actor.

Applying criteria for non-core status of the agent phrase, Arka and Kosmas [2005] argue that Manggarai, an Austronesian language spoken in Flores, has a passive demoting the Actor to a prepositional agentive phrase. Manggarai is remarkable since the passive has no verbal marking and passive is marked on the agentive phrase [Arka and Kosmas, 2005, 87].

One example that has attracted a considerable amount of attention is an agent-demoting construction in Acehese (Austronesian) (Lawler 1977, 1988, Durie 1988, Legate 2012, 2014). This construction has been analysed as a passive with an obligatory agent phrase (Lawler 1977, 1988, Legate 2012, 2014) or as an active form that is part of the voice system of the language with the demoted subject marked by an ergative marker *le* [Durie, 1988].<sup>24</sup> In contrast to Indonesian and Balinese, where the *di*-passive is restricted to 3rd person actors and the *di*-prefix is invariable in the passive, in the Acehese construction the prefix-agreement tracks the features of the agentive phrase that can be any person-number combination (97)-b. Despite the agreement with the actor in the Acehese construction, Legate [2012, 2014] gives a range of arguments showing that the pre-verbal NP behaves as a subject while the *lé*-phrase behaves as an

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<sup>24</sup>Ergative marking and passives are related in some languages and the relationship between passives and ergatives is often discussed in work on ergativity see McGregor [2017] for discussion of links between ergativity and passives, see Erlewine et al. [2017] for a discussion of ergativity and Austronesian voice systems.

adjunct on a par with PPs in Acehnese.

- (97) a. Lôn di-kap lé uleue nyan. (Acehnese)  
1SG 3.FAM-bite LE snake DEM  
'I was bitten by the snake.'
- b. Aneuk miet nyan meu-tingkue lé kamoe.  
child small DEM 1.EXCL-carry LE 1.EXCL  
'The child is carried by us.' [Legate, 2012, 497, ex 1b/3a]

The voice systems of the Nilotic languages Kurmuk Andersen [2015], Dinka Andersen [1991], Erlewine et al. [2017] and Shilluk Remijsen and Ayoker [2018] show a pattern similar to the Austronesian type. Andersen [2015, 518-523] argues in detail against a passive analysis of Object Voice in Kurmuk (his OBJECT TOPIC SENTENCES), based on the expression of pronominal agents in these constructions. Remijsen and Ayoker [2018] note that Shilluk Object voice has the profile of more familiar passive constructions since it is morphologically marked on the verb, and the subject is syntactically demoted. Using the diagnostics in Legate [2012], Remijsen and Ayoker [2018, 26-34] give detailed evidence that in the Shilluk Object voice the logical subject is demoted to a constituent that patterns with PPs (Shilluk differs from Acehnese in that the demoted subject PP is optional). However, Remijsen and Ayoker [2018, 34] conclude that in terms of information structure, the Shilluk Object voice does not pattern like a passive construction - that would stand in opposition to an unmarked active construction -, as Object voice is the unmarked voice that is used when the entire sentence is new information.

The data reviewed in this section show that while Object or Undergoer Voice shares properties with passive constructions, Object/Undergoer Voice may differ from passives with respect to the optionality of the demoted subject (as in Acehnese) or the information structure status of Object Voice (as in Malagasy or Shilluk).

### 1.6.6. Passives without passive morphology

Treatments of the passive differ in whether they include constructions without passive marking on the verb in the definition of passive constructions. On the one hand, Siewierska [1984] includes marking in her definition of the passive

(1), and Haspelmath [1990, 27] views passives as a category marked in the verbal domain and argues that constructions that have been analysed as passives without passive morphology should be analysed differently. On the other hand, Keenan [1985] defines passive as demotion of the logical subject, and does not include passive marking on the verbal phrase in the definition of passive constructions.<sup>25</sup>

A definition of passive in terms of subject demotion and object promotion is logically independent of morphological voicemarking. Languages that mark grammatical subjecthood by word-order properties and predicate agreement are common, and argument reduction with promotion of a logical object can be in principle expressed by change in word-order without voice-marking on the verb.

This section summarises evidence from a range of typologically diverse languages that confirm that argument demotion of the logical subject can be expressed by purely syntactic means. The constructions considered here appear without any morphological passive marking on the verb but display the other characteristic properties of passive constructions (LaCharité and Wellington 1999, Cobbinah and Lüpke 2009). (For constructions that do not have passive marking on the verb but require morphology marking the demoted logical subject see Arka and Kosmas [2005] on Manggarai in section 1.5.3.)

In their study of Jamaican Creole, LaCharité and Wellington [1999] provide evidence that the construction without marking on the verb exemplified in (98)-b is a passive construction.

- (98) a. Kieti rait Jaiz di leta. (Jamaican Creole)  
           K write J the letter  
           ‘K wrote J the letter.’
- b. Di leta rait  
           the letter write  
           ‘The letter was written.’ [LaCharité and Wellington, 1999, exx  
           (2)a-v./b-v.]

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<sup>25</sup>Note that Keenan [2013] includes marking on the verb as a characteristic of passives.



The Jamaican Creole construction in (98)-b does not allow an oblique expression of the agent [Winford, 1993, 118]. However, (98)-b clearly differs from other subject-backgrounding constructions. Unlike anticausatives, the Jamaican Creole passive allows modification by agent-oriented adverbs like *on popos* ‘on purpose’ distinguishing them from anticausatives [LaCharité and Wellington, 1999, 271, ex 16b] and unlike property middles, it is compatible with reference to particular events and combines with punctual temporal adverbs (99)-a and the progressive (99)-b [LaCharité and Wellington, 1999, 272].

- (99) a. Di hous peent dis maanin. (Jamaican Creole)  
the house paint this morning  
‘The house was painted this morning.’  
b. Chikin a kil.  
chicken PROG kill  
‘Chicken are being killed.’ [LaCharité and Wellington, 1999, 272, exx (20)d/ (21)-b].

In Minyanka (Gur, Niger-Congo) reduction of the logical subject is not marked on the verb, but the logical object is syntactically promoted: it is marked as a subject as it precedes the predicative particle. The demoted subject can be optionally expressed in an agent phrase introduced by the post-position *má* [Coulibaly, 2020, 269]. The demoted subject in Minyanka has to be animate (100)-b/(101)-c – inanimate demoted subjects are unacceptable (101)-b.

- (100) a. Nù yà yó-ŋóyí gà. (Minyanka)  
cow.sg PRV.AFF water-SG.DEF drink  
‘The cow drank water.’  
b. Yó-ŋóyí yá gà (nù mà).  
water-SG.DEF PRV.AFF drink (cow.SG P<sub>agent</sub>)  
‘The water was drunk (by the cow).’  
[Coulibaly, 2020, 269, exx 8-65b/c]
- (101) a. Yó-ŋóyí wá nù gò. (Minyanka)  
water-SG.DEF PRF.AFF cow.SG kill  
Lit. ‘The water killed the cow.’  
b. Nù wà gò (\* yó-ŋóyí má).  
cow.sg PRF.AFF kill ( water-SG.DEF P<sub>agent</sub>)

‘The cow was killed (\*by the water)’ (Sékou Coulibaly, p.c.)

- (102) <sup>ok</sup> Nù wà gò pí má. (Minyanka)  
 cow.SG PRF.AFF kill 3PL.CLp P<sub>agent</sub>  
 (i) ‘The cow was killed by them.’  
 (ii) ‘The cow was killed for them.’ [Coulibaly, 2020, 270, exx 8-67b]

In Minyanka, the postposition marking the agent phrase of the passive also marks benefactives, and with a human complement as in (102), the sentence is ambiguous between the two interpretations [Coulibaly, 2020, 270].<sup>26</sup>

## 1.7. Conclusion

The present chapter examines passive constructions defined as subject-demoting constructions with an implicit agent.

The rich literature on passive constructions cross-linguistically provides a range of diagnostics for the demotion of the subject to adjunct and for the promotion of the subject. As grammatical subject is a gradient notion, object promotion to grammatical subject in a passive construction can be partial in a number of ways.

While highly grammaticalized passives have few grammatical restrictions, less grammaticalized passive constructions may be subject to numerous restrictions bearing on the person-number features of the promoted object and the demoted subject, on the range of verbs that may enter a given passive construction, on the availability of non-finite forms for a passive construction, and on the tense-aspect values a passive construction may combine with.

In languages with more than one productive passive construction, the con-

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<sup>26</sup>However, the agent phrase and the benefactive cannot both be DPs marked by *má*. In the presence of an agent phrase, the benefactive has to be introduced by *ngà* ‘give’.

- (i) jé gàtò-táá-íájì wà yàlà Ísá má mà ngà mè má  
 DEM cake-nice-SG.DEF PRF.AFF prepare Issa P<sub>agent</sub> INF give 1SG.EMPH to  
 ‘This nice cake was prepared by Issa to give it to me.’

structions can display differentiation with respect to the tense-aspect properties they apply to.

**Related Articles** 033 Grammaticalization, 057 Order of valency changing morphology, 081 Synthetic vs. analytic expressions

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