Passive: Introduction

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1. Active and Passive

Basic question:
In the vast majority of analyses and frameworks, active and passive sentences are related in some way (e.g. via transformations, or via lexical rules; see below). But why should this have to be the case?

Answer (Perlmutter & Soames (1979)):
There are identical selectional restrictions. One ends up with a redundant analysis if the restrictions are stated twice in the grammar, once for active sentences, once for passive sentences.

(1) a. Hypothesis A:
Active and passive sentences are derived from different underlying structures. The underlying structure of each is essentially the same as its surface structure.
b. Hypothesis B:
Active and passive sentences are derived from the same underlying structures.

(2) Active sentences
a. Object:
(i) The legislature impeached the senator.
(ii) *The legislature impeached the wallpaper.
b. Subject:
(i) The governor reapportioned the legislature.
(ii) *The legislature was reapportioned by the governor.

(3) Passive sentences
a. New subject:
(i) The senator was impeached by the legislature.
(ii) *The wallpaper was impeached by the legislature.
b. By-phrase:
(i) The legislature was reapporited by the governor.
(ii) *The legislature was reapporited by the wallpaper

Conclusion:
Hypothesis B is right. In a classic transformational approach, there are two versions of it:

(4) a. Hypothesis B1:
The underlying form of sentences is active. Passives are derived from actives by an optional rule of passivization.
b. Hypothesis B2:
The underlying form of sentences is passive. Actives are derived from passives by an optional rule of activalization.

Problem:
It is not a priori clear which hypothesis is the more adequate one. In particular, notions like frequency do not help. German main clauses are presumably much more frequent in most corpora than embedded clauses; still, it's embedded clauses that determine basic word order in the VP (Bierwisch (1963)).

(5) German word order:
a. dass Maria den Brief ab-schickt
   that Maria_{nom} the letter_{acc} off-sends
b. Maria schickt den Brief ab
   Maria_{nom} sends the letter_{acc} off
c. dass Karl das Buch lesen will
   that Karl_{nom} the book_{acc} read wants
d. Karl will das Buch lesen
   Karl_{nom} wants the book_{acc} read

e. Das Buch will Karl lesen
   the book_{acc} wants Karl_{nom} read

(6) Idioms:
a. Everyone took advantage of their inexperience.
b. Advantage was taken – of their inexperience by everyone.
c. Their inexperience was taken advantage of – by everyone.
   (pseudo-passive)

(7) Restrictions on determinerless ‘advantage’
a. She has a big advantage.
b. *She has advantage.
c. His advantage is significant.
d. *Advantage is significant.

(8) **Assumptions:**
a. If the underlying form is active (B₁), passivization can derive (6-b) and (6-c).
b. If the underlying form is passive (B₂), activization can apply on the basis of either (6-b) or (6-c).

**Conclusion:**
Hypothesis B₁ necessitates fewer assumptions about whether *advantage* can or cannot show up without a determiner.

**A possible further conceptual argument:** Potter’s problem

(9) **Potter’s problem:**

• Deletion applied to some structure can only affect material that is part of the structure, but with insertion/epenthesis, things are more complicated because it is a priori unclear exactly what kind of material can or must be inserted into a given structure.

• Prof. McGonagall: ‘So … today we are starting Vanishing Spells. These are easier than Conjuring Spells, which you would not usually attempt until NEWT level, but they are still among the most difficult magic you will be tested on in your OWL.’ She was quite right; Harry found the Vanishing Spells horribly difficult.” (J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. London: Bloomsbury, 2003. p. 232)

**Note:**
This would then have consequences for the modelling of phenomena like applicative formation (cf. Baker (1988) vs. Pylkkänen (2000)) and causativization.

2. **A Syntactic Approach: The Passive Transformation**

(10) **Transformations.**
A transformation T takes a phrase marker (syntactic tree) P₁ and maps it onto another phrase marker P₂.

1. **SD:** ‘Structural Description’
2. **SC:** ‘Structural Change’
3. **X, Y, Z, W** are variables over arbitrary (including empty) strings of words.

(11) **Passive transformation** (optional; informal version. Chomsky (1957)):
If S₁ is a grammatical sentence of the form

\[ NP₁ - Aux - V - NP₂, \]

then the corresponding string of the form

\[ NP₂ - Aux + be + en - V - by + NP₁ \]

is also a grammatical sentence.

(12) **Passive transformation** (optional; less informal version. Chomsky (1957)):

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
X & NP & Aux & Y & V & Z & NP & W \\
SD: & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 \Rightarrow \\
SC: & 1 & 7 & 3+be+en & 4 & 5 & 6 & by+2 & 8 \\
\end{array}
\]

3. **A Lexical Approach: Lexical Rules**

**Hypothesis:**
Active and passive sentences are not transformationally related. Rather, a lexical rule is operative in the mental lexicon that systematically produces passive forms of (transitive) verbs on the basis of active forms, by modifying the argument structure, the case assignment properties, and (possibly) the morphology.

(13) **A lexical passive rule in Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG; Bresnan (1982)):**

a. \((\text{SUB}) \rightarrow O/(\text{OBJ})\)
b. \((\text{OBJ}) \rightarrow (\text{SUB})\)

Sells (1985, 161): “Ignoring the morphological change […] this takes the argument associated with the object of the active form and makes it the subject, and either assigns the argument paired with the old subject or the null function to an oblique agent phrase.”

(14) **A lexical passive rule in Lexical Decomposition Grammar (LDG; Wunderlich (1993)):**

\[
V (x, y) \rightarrow V (x, y) \\
+\theta + \theta \\
+\text{CASE}
\]

**A possible argument for a lexical treatment:**
Passivization can feed other seemingly lexical operations, like attributive adjective formation.
4. A Lexical Approach: Government and Binding Theory

Note:
The approach to passivization in Chomsky (1981) and much related work is inherently lexical, although it is often wrongly characterized as syntactic. There are four steps in the approach to passivization in Chomsky (1981), and only the very last (and least crucial) one is syntactic: (i) argument reduction, (ii) case absorption, (iii) morphological reflex, (iv) case-driven movement.

Step I: Argument reduction:
A passive version of a verb is produced by a lexical rule where the external θ-role of the active form of the verb is absorbed:
\[ V(x, y) \rightarrow V(-, y) \]

Step II: Case absorption:
A passive verb thus generated in the lexicon cannot assign accusative case, even if the corresponding active verb form can:
\[ V_{acc}(-, y) \rightarrow V_(-, y) \]

Note:
This does not have to be stipulated separately. It follows from Buszio’s Generalization.

Buszio’s Generalization (Buszio (1986)):
If V does not take an external argument, it cannot assign structural accusative case.


a. dass [TP T [VP Maria ankommt]]
   that Maria\textsubscript{nom} arrives
b. dass [TP T [VP dem Fritz ein Fehler unterlief]]
   that the Fritz\textsubscript{dat} a mistake\textsubscript{nom} happened

type: object status of nominative arguments of unaccusative verbs:

a. Was, sind [DP t\textsubscript{i} für Leute] angekommen?
   what are for people\textsubscript{nom} arrived
b. *Was, haben [DP t\textsubscript{i} für Leute] dort gearbeitet?
   what have for people\textsubscript{nom} there worked

c. [VPz Ein Fehler unterlaufen] ist dem Fritz noch nie t\textsubscript{2}
   a mistake\textsubscript{nom} happened is the Fritz\textsubscript{dat} yet never

d. *[VPz Ein Film gefallen] hat dem Fritz nicht t\textsubscript{2}
   a film\textsubscript{nom} pleased has the Fritz\textsubscript{dat} not

Step III: Morphological reflex:
A verb [V(-, y)] generated by steps I and II is accompanied by passive morphology.

Step IV: Case-driven movement:
In languages like English, where the VP-internal argument DP cannot get nominative case from T in its in-situ position, and/or where T has an EPP feature that requires the generation of SpecT, case-driven movement takes place.

A sample derivation:\(^1\)

a. \textit{kiss\textsubscript{acc}} (\theta\textsubscript{1}, \theta\textsubscript{2}) \rightarrow \textit{kiss\textsubscript{acc}} (-, \theta\textsubscript{2})
   (lexicon)
b. \textit{kiss\textsubscript{acc}} (-, \theta\textsubscript{2}) \rightarrow \textit{kiss\textsubscript{acc}} (-, \theta\textsubscript{2})
   (lexicon)
c. \textit{kiss\textsubscript{ed}} (-, \theta\textsubscript{2}) \rightarrow \textit{kiss\textsubscript{ed}}(-, \theta\textsubscript{2})
   (lexicon)
d. Merge (kiss-ed (-, \theta\textsubscript{2}), John) \rightarrow [VP kiss-ed John]
e. [\ldots]
f. Move ([TP \textsubscript{T} was ] [VP kissed John], John) \rightarrow
   [TP John\textsubscript{nom} [TP \textsubscript{T} was ] [VP kissed t\textsubscript{1}]]
   (syntax)

Note:
In languages in which T does not have an EPP property, and nominative case can be assigned directly to VP-internal items, there is no (obligatory) movement to “subject” position (i.e., SpecT).

Passive without movement in German (Haider (1993)):

a. dass der Karl der Maria zum Geburtstag wahrscheinlich ein
   that the Karl\textsubscript{nom} the Maria\textsubscript{dat} for the birthday probably a
   Buch schenkte
   book\textsubscript{acc} gave
b. dass der Maria zum Geburtstag wahrscheinlich ein Buch
   that the Maria\textsubscript{dat} for the birthday probably a book\textsubscript{nom}
   geschenkt wurde
   given was

\(^1\) Convention: Underlining indicates external arguments, i.e., arguments that are base-generated outside of the projection of the predicate that they are arguments of.
Further issues. no. 1

(25) The status of 'by' phrases:
   a. Jason was killed by Medea.
   b. Fritz wurde von Maria umgebracht. 
      Fritz was by Maria killed

Problem:
Where does the agent argument in the by phrase come from, and why is it realized as part of a PP?

Further issues. no. 2

(26) Impersonal passive in German:
   a. Hier wird jetzt gearbeitet.
      here is now worked
   b. Getanzt wurde nicht.
      danced was not
   c. *Hier wird jetzt gefallen.
      here is now pleased
   d. Jetzt muss gestorben werden.
      now must died be

Problem:
The canonical Government-Binding approach predicts impersonal passives (i.e., passives with intransitive verbs) to be possible in principle. However, it is not quite clear why passivization is possible with unergative intransitive verbs (where the sole argument is VP-external), but not with unaccusative intransitive verbs (where the sole argument is VP-internal).

Ad hoc solution:
One can stipulate that step 1 only applies to external (i.e., underlined) arguments (as opposed to highest arguments).

Further issues. no. 3

(27) Passivization in Chinese:
   a. Zhù làoshí pǐyě-le wǒ-de kǎoshī 
      Zhu professor mark-ASP my test
      ‘Professor Zhu marked my test.’
   b. Wǒ-de kǎoshī bēi Zhù làoshí pǐyě-le 
      my test by Zhu professor mark-ASP
      ‘My test was marked by Professor Zhu.’

(28) Passivization in Accə (Austronesian: Malay; Sumatra):
   a. Gòpnyan ka gi-com lôn
      she PERF kiss I
      ‘She (already) kissed me.’
   b. Lón ka gi-com kě-gòpnyan
      I PERF kiss by she
      ‘I’ve (already) been kissed by her.’

Problem:
In some languages, it seems as though passivization can take place without a morphological reflex.

Solution:
The core of passivization is step 1: argument reduction. Everything else is of secondary importance, and subject to parametric variation.

Further issues. no. 4

(29) Transitive passives in Ukrainian:
   a. Cerkv-a bul-a zbudova-n-a v 1640 roč’
      church-nom/fem was-fem build-pass-fem in year 1640
      ‘The church was built in 1640.’
   b. Cerkv-u bul-o zbudova-n-o v 1640 roč’
      church-akk/fem was-neut build-pass-neut in year 1640
      ‘The church was built in 1640.’

Problem:
In some languages (among them Ukrainian, Northern Russian varieties, Czech), passivization does not imply absorption of structural accusative case.

Solution:
Barzio’s Generalization does not hold without qualification. Again, the core property of passivization is argument reduction; all other steps are secondary.

Further issues. no. 5

(30) Passivization and lexical case: lexical datives in German:
   a. Wir werden der Sache nachgesehen.
      we-nom will the thing-dat pursue
   b. *Die Sache wird nachgegangen.
      the thing-nom is pursued
c. Der Sache wird nachgegangen.
the thing that is pursued
(31) Passive and lexical case: lexical genitives in German:
a. Dort gedachte man der Kämpferinnen und
there commemorated one\textsubscript{nom} the\textsubscript{gen} fighters\textsubscript{gen,fem} and
Kämpfer des antifaschistischen Widerstands.
fighters\textsubscript{gen,masc} the\textsubscript{gen} antifascist
resistance\textsubscript{gen}
b. *Dort wurden die Kämpferinnen und Kämpfer des
there were the\textsubscript{nom} fighters\textsubscript{nom,fem} and fighters\textsubscript{nom,masc} the\textsubscript{acc}
antifaschistischen Widerstands gedacht.
antifascist resistance\textsubscript{gen} commemorated
c. Dort wurde der Kämpferinnen und Kämpfer des
there was the\textsubscript{gen} fighters\textsubscript{gen,fem} and fighters\textsubscript{gen,masc} the\textsubscript{gen}
antifaschistischen Widerstands gedacht.
antifascist resistance\textsubscript{gen} commemorated

Note:
This is expected, given that it is only the structural accusative feature that is absorbed in step II. not a lexical feature of V. Thus, these cases are ordinary instances of impersonal passives.

5. Verbal vs. Adjectival Passive

Standard assumption:
There is reason to distinguish between verbal passives, which may be syntactically formed, and adjectival passives, which are formed in the lexicon. (See Wasow (1977), Williams (1981), Bresnan (1982), Levin & Rappaport (1986), among many others.)

Note:
The two kinds of passive are known in German as Vorgangspassiv (‘verbal passive’) and Zustandspassiv (‘adjectival passive’).

(32) Un-prefixion:
a. The rules are ungiven
also cf. unopened, unshaven, untouched
b. *We are ungiven (the rules)
(Subject = theme)
(33) Wh-movement:
a. How firmly promised are these things?
b. *How firmly promised were those people?

(34) \(\theta\)-role variability:
a. adjectival passive: always theme
b. verbal passive: theme, goal, source:
   (i) Those people were promised these books
   (ii) These books were promised to those people
(35) Passive auxiliary selection:
a. Die Geisslein sind/waren versteckt
the goats are/were hidden
b. Die Geisslein werden/wurden versteckt
the goats are/were hidden
c. Die Geisslein sind/waren versteckt worden
the goats are/were hidden been
(36) ‘By’-phrases (though this restriction is nowadays often disputed):
a. *Die Geisslein sind von niemanden versteckt
the goats are by no-one hidden
b. Die Geisslein werden von niemanden versteckt
the goats are by no-one hidden
c. Die Geisslein sind von niemanden versteckt worden
the goats are by no-one hidden been
(37) Temporal adverbs:
a. Das Fenster ist seit gestern geöffnet (= offen)
the window is since yesterday opened (= open)
b. #Das Fenster wird seit gestern geöffnet
the window is since yesterday opened
(38) Control into purpose clauses:
a. *Der Reifen war aufgepumpt [CP um die Fahrt fortzusetzen] 
the tire was inflated in order the journey to continue
b. Der Reifen wurde aufgepumpt [CP um die Fahrt fortzusetzen] 
the tire was inflated in order the journey to continue
(39) Analysis of adjectival passives in Government-Binding theory (Borer (1984)):
a. Affixation by passive morphology: ed
b. Category change: \([+V,-N] \rightarrow [+V,+N]\)
c. Complete suppression of the external argument of V
d. Externalization of an internal argument of V
e. Case absorption
f. Deletion of a VP-internal object slot
6. More Types of Passivization in German

Note:
In addition to Vorgangspassiv (regular verbal passive) and Zustandspassiv (adjectival passive), German has several more passive -like constructions that all minimally involve the crucial defining step I: argument reduction. See Höhle (1978).

6.1. Recipient Passive

Note:
There are actually two verbal passives in German: one with the passive auxiliary werden and one with the passive auxiliary bekommen (kriegen) (also cf. get-passives in English). The second type of passive is sometimes called “recipient passive”. It mainly shows up in double object constructions; the phenomenon may not yet be fully grammaticalized (e.g., there is an animacy restriction).

(40) Recipient passive in German:
   a. dass der Fritz der Maria das Buch geschenkt hat. (the Fritz NOM the Maria DAT the book ACC given has)
   b. dass die Maria das Buch geschenkt bekommt (kriegt). (the Maria NOM the book ACC given gets)
   c. dass der Maria das Buch geschenkt wird. (the Maria NOM the book ACC given is)
   d. *dass der Maria das Buch geschenkt bekommt (kriegt). (the Maria NOM the book ACC given gets)
   e. *dass die Maria das Buch geschenkt wird. (the Maria NOM the book ACC given is)

(41) Animacy restriction:
   a. dass man dem Plan die Zustimmung verweigerte (the man NOM the plan ACC denied)
   b. *dass der Plan die Zustimmung verweigerte kriegt (the plan NOM the animacy denied got)

(42) Recipient passive without recipients:
   a. dass man der Maria das Fahrrad geklaut hat (the man NOM the Maria DAT the bike ACC stolen has)
   b. dass die Maria das Fahrrad geklaut gekriegt hat (the Maria NOM the bike ACC stolen gotten has)

(43) Intransitive contexts with a lexical dative:
   a. Hier wird keinem geholfen. (here gets no-one DAT helped)

Observation:
It looks as though passivization in German double object constructions can alternatively involve absorption of an accusative feature (with werden) or a dative feature (with bekommen). In other, closely related languages, such optionality may show up with a single passive auxiliary. This is the case in Norwegian, for instance.

(44) Passivization in Norwegian double object constructions:
   a. Jon1 ble gitt en bok t1
      Jon NOM was given a book ACC
   b. En bok1 ble gitt Jon1
      a book NOM was given John NOM

6.2. ‘Lassen’-Passive

Note:
In exceptional case marking (accusativus cum infinitivo) contexts with lassen (‘let’), passivization may apply to the embedded infinitival clause, but there is typically no morphological reflex.

(45) lässt-passive
   a. dass der König [ den Sklaven den Wein reinkriegen ] lässt (the king NOM the slave ACC the wine ACC bring in lets)
   b. dass der König [ – den Wein reinkriegen ] lässt (the king NOM – the wine ACC bring in lets)

6.3. Modal Passives

Note:
The passive auxiliary sein is not confined to adjectival passive contexts; it can also show up in modal passive constructions, implying either possibility or necessity. The readings can be disambiguated by the specific choice of by-phrase (für (‘for’) vs. von (‘by’)).

(46) Modal passives:
   a. Mindestens eine Aufgabe ist für jeden Studenten zu lösen (at least one exercise is for every student to solve
      ‘Every student can solve at least one exercise.’)
b. Mindestens eine Aufgabe ist von jedem Studenten zu lösen
   at least one exercise is by every student to solve
   ‘Every student must solve at least one exercise.’

6.4. ‘Gehören’-Passive

Note:
Another modal passive is formed with the passive auxiliary gehören (‘should be’ in
this usage; lit. ‘belong’).

(47) a. dass man den Graben zuschütten sollte
   that one the ditch\textsubscript{nom} fill up should
b. dass der Graben zugeschüttet gehört
   that the ditch\textsubscript{nom} filled up should be

6.5. ‘Gehen’-Passive

Another modal passive: gehen (‘go’) as a passive auxiliary.

(48) a. dass Maria die Tür öffnen kann
   Maria\textsubscript{nom} the door\textsubscript{acc} open can
b. dass die Tür zu öffnen geht
   that the doornom to open goes

6.6. ‘Bar’-Adjectives

Note:
Yet another modal passive involves derivational morphology, viz., suffixation of
the verb stem by the passive affix bar (‘able’).

(49) a. Man konnte die Begegnung vermeiden
   one could the meeting avoid
b. Die Begegnung war vermeidbar
   the meeting was avoidable

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