

Passive: Arguments Raised

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1. Background

Main claim (Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989)):

The passive morpheme *is* the external argument.

This is a return to a *syntactic* (rather than *lexical*) approach to passivization in Principles-and-Parameters Theory: No aspect of passivization is dealt with in the lexicon anymore.

Note:

Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989) do not yet envisage a vP domain in the clause structure. However, one can assume that PASS (*'en'*) is base-generated as a v (rather than as an I), and subsequently undergoes lowering (*'downgrading'*) to V, an approach along the lines of Chomsky (2001) that has CP, TP, vP, and VP as the clausal spine. (Since v cannot assign accusative case to itself, V must presumably be assumed to be the case-assigning head.)

(1) *Updated clause structure:*

a. Base structure:

$[_{TP} - [_{T'} T_{*nom*} [_{vP} [_{v} PASS] [_{VP} V_{*acc*} DP]]]]]]$

b. Lowering of PASS to V:

$[_{TP} - [_{T'} T_{*nom*} [_{vP} [_{v} -] [_{VP} [_{V} PASS V_{*acc*}] DP]]]]]]$

c. Case assignment (acc) to PASS (by V):

$[_{TP} - [_{T'} T_{*nom*} [_{vP} [_{v} -] [_{VP} [_{V} PASS_{acc} V] DP]]]]]]$

d1. NP-movement of DP to SpecT for case (nom):

$[_{TP} DP_{nom} [_{T'} T [_{vP} [_{v} -] [_{VP} [_{V} PASS_{acc} V] -]]]]]]$

d2. Case assignment (nom) to DP (by T) in situ:

$[_{TP} - [_{T'} T [_{vP} [_{v} -] [_{VP} [_{V} PASS_{acc} V] DP_{nom}]]]]]]$

2. Deriving Core Properties of Passive

I: Argument reduction:

PASS *is* the external argument; there is no room for *another* external argument. (There is room for a *by*-phrase, though, which acts as the final member in a non-trivial passive chain.)

II: Case absorption:

Structural accusative case is assigned to PASS, hence not available for the object DP anymore. (This would seem to follow from minimality of case-assignment: PASS is closer to V than its DP sister is. In addition, DP can move to SpecT, which PASS cannot.) As a consequence, there is a complete *case reversal*: The external argument gets the case normally assigned to the internal argument, and the internal argument gets the case normally assigned to the external argument.

III: Morphological reflex:

PASS is a head that cliticizes onto V.

IV: Case-driven movement:

In languages like English, movement of the object DP to SpecT is both possible (since there is no external argument that shows up in this position) and required (since this is the only way for the object DP to get case). In languages without an EPP property, and where case assignment by T is possible into the VP, such movement is superfluous.

3. Further Issues

Further issues, no.1: 'By' phrases:

By-phrases are final members of chains headed by PASS morphemes.

Further issues, no. 2: Impersonal passives:

Either PASS can get case from T (which is an option anyway in languages like German), or PASS is rendered “visible” here without case assignment, by being part of V (cf. Baker (1988) in incorporation). (Still, it must be assigned case if it can be assigned case; otherwise, it would not follow that the object DP in a regular passive construction cannot be assigned accusative by V in German.)

Further issues, no. 3: Languages without overt morphological reflex of passive:

PASS can be non-overt.

Further issues, no. 4: Transitive passives in Ukrainian etc.:

PASS does not need case at all, by virtue of being part of V. (Again cf. Baker (1988))

on incorporation.)

Further issues, no. 5: Lexical case:

The situation looks exactly as in the case of impersonal passives. (As in other approaches, lexical case does not interact with passivization; it cannot do so since its assignment is tied to the assignment of a specific θ -role.)

4. Arguments for the Analysis

4.1. Strong Crossover

- (2) *Who₁ does she₁ like t₁ ?
- (3) a. *They₁ were kill-PASS₁ t₁
b. *They₁ were kill-PASS₁ t₁ [PP by themselves₁]

Analysis:

Strong crossover effects can be derived from the constraints on chain formation in Rizzi (1986).

- (4) *Chain:*
C = $\langle x_1, \dots, x_n \rangle$ is a chain iff, for $1 < i < n$, x_i locally binds x_{i+s} .

Consequence:

This definition has the effect that it imposes a local binding constraint on chain formation. In particular, even “intervening” co-indexed elements will now have to enter a chain they intuitively do not belong to. If the intervening element occupies a θ -position, the resulting chain will invariably violate the θ -criterion of Chomsky (1981) since it contains two θ -roles.

4.2. Unaccusatives

Question:

Why can unaccusatives (normally) not undergo passivization?

- (5) a. dass die Kinder in diesem Waisenhaus schnell wachsen
that the children in this orphanage fast grow
b. *dass von den Kindern in diesem Waisenhaus schnell gewachsen wird
that by the children in this orphanage fast grown is

Answer:

PASS can only show up as a form of v (I, in the original analysis), hence it is confined to a VP-external position. Unaccusatives, by definition, take no external argument.

Next question:

How can there be some languages after all in which a passivization of unaccusatives is possible (Lithuanian among them)?

Answer:

Here PASS is nominal; it can be base-generated in the VP as a nominal argument first, moved to SpecT in the next step, and then undergo lowering to V in the final step. (This qualifies as an instance of yo-yo movement.)

An alternative account(?):

- (i) The analysis presupposes that downgrading *counter-feeds* (i.e., comes too late to feed) θ -assignment: After lowering from v (I) to V, PASS is in the canonical position for internal θ -role assignment.
(ii) Some languages might, in addition, permit the reverse order of rule application: downgrading may *feed* θ -assignment. This then permits passives of unaccusatives.

4.3. Auxiliaries and Ellipsis

- (6) *Gary was being given a book, and Mary was being, too.

Assumptions:

- (i) Auxiliaries need a *bi-clausal* structure independently because PASS and V would otherwise be too far apart to come together in the syntax.
(ii) VP ellipsis must involve VPs (which may be headed by an empty V).
- (7) a. Mary has been kissed.
b. Mary -PASS have be kiss-
c. [S - [T' T [VP [V have] [VP [V be] [S PASS [VP [V kiss] Mary]]]]]]

References

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