

Voice Phrases and their Specifiers

Master: 04-046-2012 (colloquium)
 IGRA: 08, Topics in Syntax (seminar)

Tuesdays, 17:15–18:45, NSG S102
 SoSe 2014, Universität Leipzig

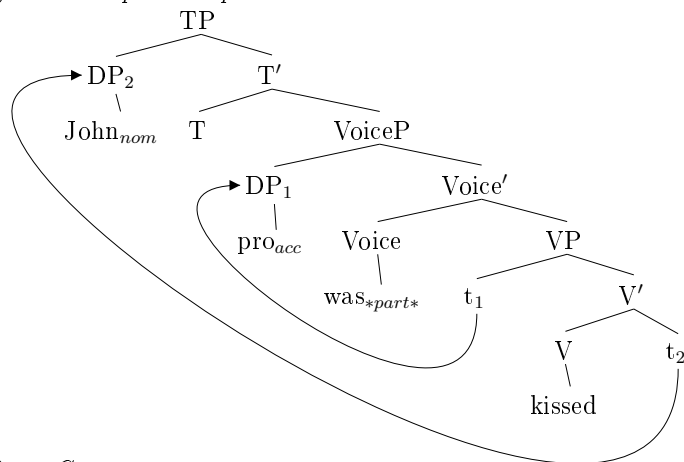
Institut für Linguistik
 Gereon Müller
 gereon.mueller@uni-leipzig.de
 http://www.uni-leipzig.de/~muellerg

1. Background

Main claim (Sternefeld (1995)):

The approach shares with Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989) the assumption that passivization is a *syntactic* (rather than *lexical*) phenomenon. The external argument is present in the syntax (which is why it is syntactically active). However, Sternefeld does not assume that the “passive morpheme” is the external argument; rather, it’s an empty category *pro* that is merged in the canonical position for external arguments and subsequently raised to the specifier of a voice phrase (Kratzer (1996)).

(1) *A simple example:*



(2) *Core assumption:*

The head of a passive VoiceP must license (via spec-head agreement) a *pro* that bears a subject theta role. (Passive auxiliaries are Voice heads that select special verb forms (so-called ‘status government’).)

Basic assumption about case:

There is a two-step approach to (structural) case: Case is first *assigned* and then *licensed*.

(3) *Case assignment:*

- a. Within the VP,
 - (i) nominative can be assigned by default;
 - (ii) accusative can be assigned if nominative has been assigned; and
 - (iii) dative can be assigned if accusative has been assigned.
- b. Assignment of structural case is possible only once; if two cases in the domain of a verb are the same, one must be either a lexical case or an agreement case.

(4) *Case licensing I: nominative:*

Tensed T can license nominative case in its specifier position.

(5) *Case licensing II: accusative and dative in German* (‘linking’; one of three versions):

- a. (i) Accusative case is licensed in VP on a direct object theta role.
 (ii) Dative case is licensed in VP on an indirect object theta role.
- b. The Voice heads *werden*_{*part*} and *sein*_{*zu*} license accusative case marking on the subject theta role.
- c. The Voice heads *kriegen*_{*part*} and *bekommen*_{*zu*} license dative case marking on the subject theta role.

Note:

An entry like *werden*_{*part*} signals that the passive auxiliary *werden* selects a participial form of the main verb (it *status-governs* a verbal form of type III, or assigns the *verbal case* III (past participle)).

2. Deriving Core Properties of Passive

I: Argument reduction:

There is no argument reduction (as in Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989)). This is why the external argument is syntactically active. If a passive Voice head shows up, it requires a *pro* that bears a subject theta role (see (2)). Thus, only derivations will succeed in this context that have a *pro* merged in the VP as an external argument to begin with. Conversely, given that (2) is the *only* way to accommodate an external argument *DP pro* in English, its distribution is confined to passive contexts. (That said, it is not quite clear how external argument *pros* are excluded in non-passive contexts.)

II: Case absorption:

There is no case absorption. In canonical passives (as in English), structural accusative case is assigned to pro in SpecVoice, as an instance of (5-b). That is why accusative case is not available for the object DP anymore, which therefore receives nominative case from T. (Again, this is similar to Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989).)

III: Morphological reflex:

The morphological reflex results as a combination of the shape of the Voice head (the passive auxiliary in English and German) and the form of the dependent V that it selects (the past participle, e.g.). (Active clauses, by assumption, have no VoiceP, so they lack a designated morphological reflex.)

IV: Case-driven movement:

Given (4), there must be case-driven movement to SpecT. However, this issue is not really crucial; case assignment without movement would follow under an Agree-based approach, for instance.

3. Sample Derivations: German

Note:

The analysis can elegantly handle regular passive constructions and recipient passive constructions in German. In one case, pro has accusative case and is licensed by *werden*_{*part*} in SpecVoice, in the other one, pro has dative case and is licensed by *kriegen*_{*part*} in SpecVoice.

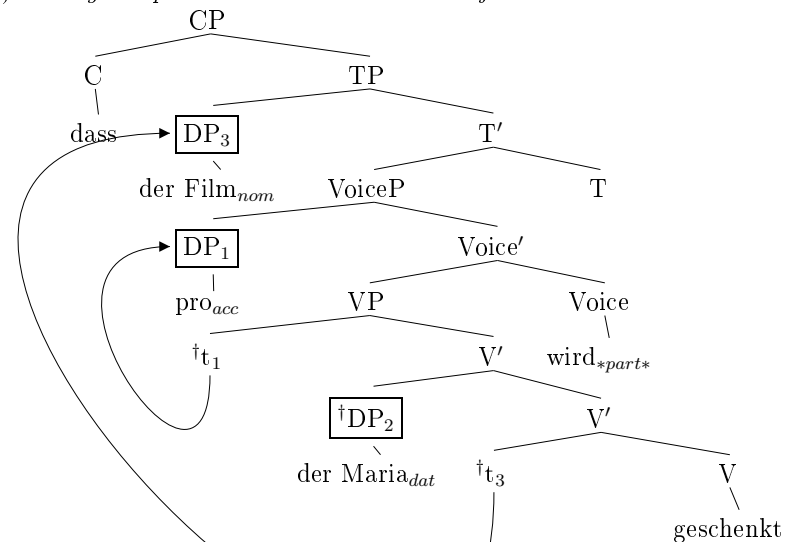
(6) *Regular and recipient passive in German double object constructions:*

- a. dass der Fritz der Maria den Film geschenkt hat.
that the Fritz_{nom} the Maria_{dat} the film_{acc} given has
- b. dass der Film der Maria geschenkt wird.
that the film_{nom} the Maria_{dat} given is
- c. dass die Maria den Film geschenkt bekommt (kriegt).
that the Maria_{nom} the film_{acc} given gets

Notation:

- (i) †DP_n: DP_n's case is assigned.
- (ii) DP_n: DP_n's case is licensed.

(7) *Regular passive in German double object constructions*



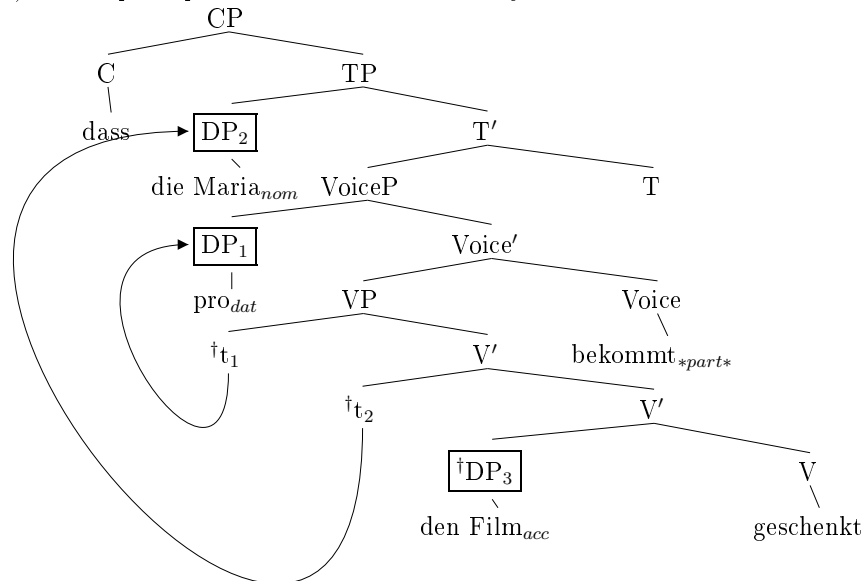
(8) *Unsuccessful derivations:*

- a. dass der Film pro der Maria geschenkt wird.
that the film_{nom} pro_{acc} the Maria_{dat} given is
- b. *dass der Film pro die Maria geschenkt wird.
that the book_{nom} pro_{dat} the Maria_{acc} given is
- c. *dass die Maria pro dem Film geschenkt wird.
that the Maria_{nom} pro_{acc} the film_{dat} given is
- d. *dass die Maria pro den Film geschenkt wird.
that the Maria_{nom} pro_{dat} the film_{acc} given is

Note:

- (i) Any structure in which SpecVoice is not pro is excluded (because of (2)).
- (ii) Any structure in which SpecT does not bear nominative is excluded (because of (4)).
- (iii) Consequently, pro can never bear nominative.
- (iv) In (8-b), dative is not licensed (because of (5-b)), and accusative is not licensed (because of (5-a-i)).
- (v) In (8-c), dative is not licensed (because of (5-a-ii)).
- (vi) In (8-d), dative is not licensed (because of (5-b)).

(9) *Recipient passive in German double object constructions*



(10) *More unsuccessful derivations:*

- a. dass die Maria pro den Film geschenkt bekommt.
that the Maria_{nom} pro_{dat} the film_{acc} given gets
- b. *dass die Maria pro dem Film geschenkt bekommt.
that the Maria_{nom} pro_{acc} the film_{dat} given gets
- c. *dass der Film pro die Maria geschenkt bekommt.
that the film_{nom} pro_{dat} the Maria_{acc} given gets
- d. *dass der Film pro der Maria geschenkt bekommt.
that the film_{nom} pro_{acc} the Maria_{dat} given gets

Note:

- (i) As before, any structure in which SpecVoice is not pro is excluded (because of (2)).
- (ii) As before, any structure in which SpecT does not bear nominative is excluded (because of (4)).
- (iii) As before, pro can therefore never bear nominative.
- (iv) In (10-b), accusative is not licensed (because of (5-c)), and dative is not licensed (because of (5-a-ii)).
- (v) In (10-c), accusative is not licensed (because of (5-a-i)).
- (vi) In (10-d), accusative is not licensed (because of (5-c)).

4. **Further Issues**

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

The assumption here is that “by-phrases bind a subject pro”. Therefore, even though more agents and instruments can be *by*-phrases in passives as such, they cannot co-occur.

(11) *Types of 'by'-phrases:*

- a. Die Armee zerstörte das U-Boot
the army destroyed the submarine
- b. Der(!) Torpedo zerstörte das U-Boot
the torpedo destroyed the submarine
- c. Das U-Boot wurde von der Armee zerstört
the submarine was by the army destroyed
- d. Das U-Boot wurde von einem Torpedo zerstört
the submarine was by a torpedo destroyed
- e. *Das U-Boot wurde von der Armee von einem Torpedo zerstört
the submarine was by the army by a torpedo destroyed

Further issues, no. 2: Impersonal passives:

(12) *Impersonal passives:*

- dass nicht [VoiceP pro₁ [VP t₁ getanzt] wurde].
that not danced was

Note:

At first sight, one might think it would suffice to assume that pro can bear nominative in German. However, this would also produce transitive passives (see below).

Conclusion:

“Assume now that impersonal passives arise from the possibility of licensing a pro without Case. For example, German would be characterized as licensing a pro_{acc}, pro_{dat}, and a pro without case.” (p. 38)

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

(13) *Passivization in Aceh* (Austronesian, Malay; Sumatra):

- a. Gəpnyan ka gi-cəm lón
she PERF kiss I
'She (already) kissed me.'
- b. Lón ka gi-cəm lé-gəpnyan
I PERF kiss by she

‘I’ve (already) been kissed by her.’

Note:

Here an analysis would seem to be straightforward: Voice remains without overt morphological realization, and there is no special status government of V by Voice.

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

(14) *Transitive passives in Ukrainian:*

- a. Cerkv-a bul-a zbudova-n-a v 1640 roc'i
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 roc'i
church-AKK/FEM was-NEUT build-PASS-NEUT in year 1640
‘The church was built in 1640.’

Assumption:

Languages like Ukrainian permit both pro_{acc} and pro_{nom} with their passive Voice heads. The remaining internal co-argument DP then either gets nominative (under raising to SpecT) or accusative (in the VP).

Further issues, no. 5: Lexical case:

(15) *Passivization and lexical case: lexical datives in German:*

- a. Wir werden der Sache nachgehen.
 we_{nom} will the thing $_{dat}$ pursue
- b. *Die Sache wird/bekommt nachgegangen.
the thing $_{nom}$ is/gets pursued
- c. Der Sache wird nachgegangen.
the thing $_{dat}$ is pursued

Analysis:

Lexical case is tied to the assignment of a thematic role, so it cannot be assigned to pro . Also, if one item is assigned lexical case in a minimal clause, then this case cannot be assigned to any other item. Consequently, (15-c) involves a pro without case, as in (other) impersonal passive constructions.

(16) *Recipient passive variability with non-ditransitive verbs:*

- a. ??Der Mann bekommt geholfen.
the man gets helped
- b. ?*Der Mann bekommt gedankt.
the man gets thanked

Strenefeld’s analysis:

‘For some speakers in some dialects [...] [(16-a)] is judged grammatical. This calls for a revision of the Case assignment rules, to the effect that structural dative cannot be limited to only ditransitive verbs. Accordingly, one would have to allow for dative case assignment with verbs that do not assign structural accusative.’ (p. 37).

Alternative:

As mentioned before, an alternative might be to assume that there is a hidden clausal object in (16-a) (but not in (16-b)), which then turns the dative case in (16-a) into a structural case. (See Fanselow (1991).)

5. Arguments for the Analysis

Standard arguments:

All standard arguments for a syntactic approach to passivization remain valid (in particular those concerning the syntactic activity of the external argument). As in the Baker et al. (1989) approach, *unaccusative* passives are excluded: Voice, by stipulation, requires a *subject theta role* in SpecVoice, i.e., an external argument.

An additional argument:

This approach to passivization immediately extends to Agent Topic vs. Theme Topic constructions in Austronesian languages (Toba Batak, Tagalog): Here either the external or the internal argument is moved to SpecVoice.

6. Other Issues

Note:

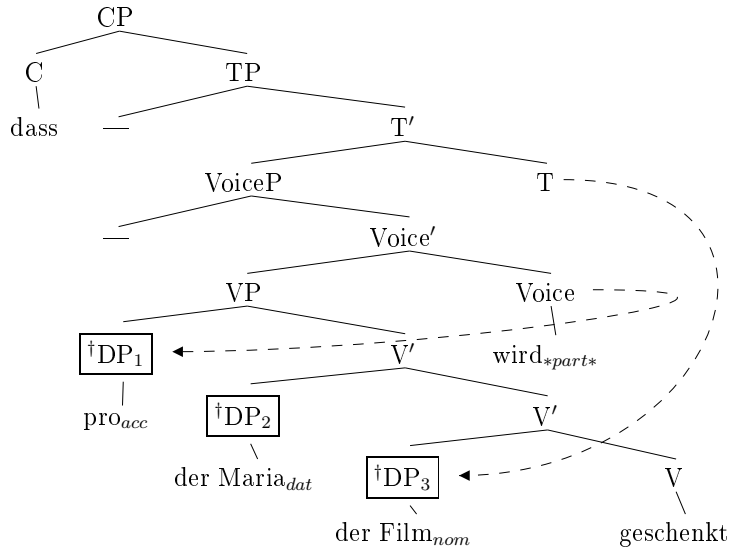
The analysis relies on movement to specifier positions for case licensing, but the relevant effects could equally well be achieved under an Agree-based approach where all the DPs can remain in situ. This would seem to be more appropriate for free word order languages, and more in line with current minimalist assumptions.

(17) *Passive without movement in German:*

- a. dass der Karl der Maria zum Geburtstag wahrscheinlich ein
that the Karl $_{nom}$ the Maria $_{dat}$ for the birthday probably a
Buch schenkte
book $_{acc}$ gave
- b. dass pro der Maria zum Geburtstag wahrscheinlich ein
that pro $_{acc}$ the Maria $_{dat}$ for the birthday probably a

Buch geschenkt wurde
 book_{nom} given was

(18) Regular passive in German double object constructions



Note:

A minimal modification of the requirements in (4), (5-b) and (5-c) (with Agree under c-command replacing the concept of obligatory specifier) will do the job.

Side remark:

Sternefeld systematically ignores German order (in particular, the verb-final/verb-second distinction), presumably in order to make the examples easier to read from an English-based perspective. These issues are completely orthogonal to the approach.

Central question:

How good is the evidence for an external argument pro with accusative (or some other) case, especially in non-pro-drop languages?

References

Baker, Mark, Kyle Johnson & Ian Roberts (1989): Passive Arguments Raised, *Linguistic Inquiry* 20, 219–251.
 Fanselow, Gisbert (1991): *Minimale Syntax*. Habilitation thesis, Universität Passau.
 Kratzer, Angelika (1996): Severing the External Argument from its Verb. In: J. Rooryck & L. Zaring, eds., *Phrase Structure and the Lexicon*. Kluwer, Dordrecht, pp. 109–137.
 Sternefeld, Wolfgang (1995): *Voice Phrases and Their Specifiers*. Ms., Universität Tübingen. (SfS-Report 05-95).