

The prepositional passive as structure-sharing

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The goal of this paper is to account for the prepositional passive, also known as pseudopassive (henceforth, *P-passive*) and the cross-linguistic variation regarding this construction. This is done by analyzing P-passive as involving structure-sharing (S-S), which allows many of its properties to be explained by the theory of Structure-Sharing, proposed by Alsina 2008 to account for long-distance dependencies (*LDD*) and raising. This analysis will allow us to relate the two sources of preposition stranding (*P-stranding*)—P-passive, as in (1a), and LDD, as in (1b), standardly assumed to be unrelated constructions in LFG—and explain the observational claim that only languages with P-stranding by LDD have P-stranding by passive. This can be achieved only in a theory that treats P-passives and LDD as having a basic element of structure in common: they both involve S-S of the object of the stranded P with a more prominent GF. There are languages with both sources of P-stranding (English and Norwegian), languages lacking P-stranding altogether (the Romance languages), and, while there are languages without P-passives that allow P-stranding in LDD (i.e., Icelandic, according to Maling and Zaenen 1985), there are no known languages with P-passives lacking P-stranding in LDD. This cross-linguistic observation needs to be explained.

- (1) a. Which article did you talk about in the workshop?
b. This article was talked about in the workshop.

A standard analysis of P-passive in LFG (Bresnan 1982: 50–62) assumes an optional reanalysis “lexical rule that morphologically incorporates a verb and an adjacent preposition into a single complex verb that governs a direct object.” In this way, a sentence such as *We talked about that article* is ambiguous between a structure with an oblique complement and a structure with a direct object. While the reanalysis hypothesis allows P-passive to be derived by the passive rule changing OBJ to SUBJ, it runs into serious problems. Some of these problems are pointed out in Postal 1986 and Baltin and Postal 1996 and include: a) the impossibility of placing the NP object of the putative V-P compound to the right of a PP as in heavy NP shift; b) the impossibility of omitting the putative V-P compound under gapping; c) the possibility of separately coordinating the preposition or the verb of this putative compound; and d) the possibility of gapping the passive verb without the preposition.

Lødrup (1991) has also argued against the V-P incorporation analysis as a prerequisite for P-passives on the basis of Norwegian, where P-passives do not require the verb and the preposition to be adjacent and are possible with a cooccurring object NP. In fact, P-passives based on transitive verbs are claimed to be possible even in English, and not only with idiomatic objects (Bolinger 1975, Ziv and Sheintuch 1981). All of these arguments call for an alternative to the lexical V-P reanalysis rule. So far, a proposal does not exist that meets the goals stated above.

The present proposal assumes that P-passives are an instance of S-S, more specifically, a kind of raising construction (cf. Lødrup 1991). The theory of Structure-Sharing predicts many of the properties of P-passives. One of the constraints of this theory—the Nonthematic Condition on Structure-Sharing—requires an S-S relation to include a nonthematic GF as the most prominent GF in every f-structure containing the relation. This requirement is met in a passive structure whose subject is shared with the object of an oblique complement, since the former GF is more prominent than the latter and not a thematic argument of the verb. Another of its constraints is Locality—the requirement that every S-S relation that spans two (or more) f-structures include a structure-shared DF in the more embedded f-structure (DF being the class of GFs comprising SUBJ and the grammaticized discourse function TOP/FOC found in LDD). This condition is satisfied in P-passives provided the prepositional f-structure (the f-structure corresponding to the stranded preposition) includes a SUBJ structure-shared with both the matrix SUBJ and its OBJ, as schematically represented in (2):

- (2) This article was talked

about
SUBJ OBJ
- SUBJ
-

The structure also satisfies the two f-binding conditions of the theory: the Non-SUBJ Binding Condition and the SUBJ Binding Condition. The latter ensures that the prepositional f-structure be an argument of the verb (since a SUBJ structure-shared with a more prominent GF must be f-bound by it,

which implies that the f-structure that the SUBJ in question is a feature of is a co-argument of the f-binder), explaining well-known asymmetries such as (3). This analysis, so far, does not assume anything specific to P-passives. The general passive rule applies to verb forms in P-passives suppressing the logical subject (making it unavailable for mapping onto a SUBJ). The theory of Structure-Sharing provides a SUBJ to an f-structure that would otherwise violate the Subject Condition (Bresnan and Kanerva 1989), without any lexical stipulation.

- (3) a. Everything is being paid for by the company.
 b. *No reason was left for. (Bresnan 1982: 50–51)

The restrictions on P-passives in English, vis-à-vis Norwegian, are accounted for by assuming (a) a tighter structural relation between the verb and the stranded preposition and (b) a stricter requirement on subject selection in English than in Norwegian. On the basis of the position that particles (i.e., prepositions) can occupy in verb-particle constructions in English, it seems reasonable to assume an “inner” position for the lexical category P as sister of V and (optional) NP and an “outer” position for phrasal categories such as NP, PP, AP, etc. as sisters of V', as in the following c-structure rules:

- (4) a. $V' \rightarrow V(NP)P$
 b. $VP \rightarrow V'XP^*$ ($XP^*=0$ or more instances of any phrasal category)

A constraint stating that a prepositional f-structure whose SUBJ is structure-shared cannot map onto a phrasal category forces the preposition in P-passives to occupy the P position introduced by rule (4a). This implies that the P in an English P-passive cannot be separated from the verb by adverbs or other phrases (as shown by examples such as **Everything was paid twice for*, from Bresnan 1982: 54), because such phrases are not licensed by rule (4a). It does allow for the possibility of an NP between the passive V and the P, as in *Her talents weren't taken advantage of* (Bresnan 1982: 60). However, for many English speakers only idiomatic NPs can appear in this position. In contrast, Norwegian (Lødrup 1991) and some English speakers (Bolinger 1975 and Ziv and Sheintuch 1981) allow a greater range of object NPs in P-passives. The more restrictive form of English is straightforwardly accounted for by a condition (not active in Norwegian and certain varieties of English) requiring a thematic argument to be chosen as a subject for preference over a nonargument. The ungrammaticality of **This oven hasn't been baked any cakes in yet* for many speakers (given as grammatical in Ziv and Sheintuch 1981) follows from this condition. With structures of the type *take advantage of*, where neither the NP *advantage* nor the object of the preposition are thematic arguments of the main predicate, a choice arises in the selection of passive subject, giving rise to P-passives (see 9 lines up) and passives with an idiomatic subject, as in *Advantage was taken of her talents*.

The difference between languages like English or Norwegian and Icelandic follows from a constraint active in Icelandic ruling out nonthematic subjects in prepositional f-structures. This constraint, in combination with the theory of Structure-Sharing, has the effect of predicting the ungrammaticality of P-passives, while allowing P-stranding in LDD, because LDD do not involve nonthematic subjects. The difference between these three languages and languages where there is no type of P-stranding (e.g. Romance) is explained by positing a constraint for the latter type ruling out S-S in prepositional f-structures. In this way, a preposition cannot be stranded in either a passive or a LDD structure. Thus, by assuming that both P-passives and LDD involve structure-sharing, we can account for the observation that, in order for a language to have P-passive, it must also have P-stranding by LDD.

References

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