

The Old Irish ‘passive’ verb, its realisations and development

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The topic of this poster is the Early Irish autonomous morphology (termed ‘passive’ in the descriptive grammars). I will show that this morphology is used for three different constructions. In the main it is used for two passive construction types, the canonical and the impersonal passive. Additionally it is used for an active subject impersonal construction.

The two passive clause types are illustrated for a transitive predicate in (1-2). Ø denotes the ‘mapping to zero’ of the higher role; I take this to be defining of the passive (cf. Bresnan 2001: 310), ignoring the problem of the agent phrase). In the canonical passive, the second argument of the predicate maps to the subject function, while in the impersonal passive, the second argument, if there is one, maps to the object function. I take the impersonal passive to be subjectless both at f- and c-structure; this will be modelled by the revised LMT of Anna Kibort (2007 in particular). The active subject impersonal is illustrated in (3), with active mapping to an (informally denoted) impersonal subject.

1. Canonical passive:

<	arg1	arg2	>
	Ø	SUBJ	

2. Impersonal passive:

<	arg1	arg2	>
	Ø	OBJ	

3. Active subject impersonal

<	arg1	arg2	>
	SUBJ _{imp}	OBJ	

Phenomena to be discussed in support of the abovementioned analysis include case marking, the agentive *by*-phrase and subject agreement in number. The Old Irish examples in (4) (Thurneysen 1998: 260, 349) illustrate some of the case marking properties of the arguments of the autonomous verb: when the second argument of an autonomous verb is a first or second person pronoun, it is realised as an infixed pronoun (4ab; glossed with the relevant person/number in the paradigm). This is similar to how pronominal objects are expressed in the active (5). In the third person, the lower role is indicated by the verbal morphology (4c), parallel to pronominal subjects in the active (5).

4.

(a) no-m- charthar PARTICLE-1SG-love.AUT ‘I am loved’	(b) no-t- charthar PARTICLE-2SG-love.AUT ‘you are loved’	(c) carthair love.AUT.3SG ‘s/he is loved’
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5. ní-m-**charat**-sa

NEG-1SG-love.3PL-EMPH
‘they do not love me’

The occurrence of unaccusative verbs in the autonomous form makes it clear that an analysis of the Old Irish autonomous verb as solely passive is problematic. I suggest that the Old Irish

autonomous form is used for the active subject impersonal construction with a group of closed verbs; one example of this is illustrated in (6) with a verb meaning ‘to be’.

6. ‘To be’ with autonomous morphology, predicative use (Ml.108b4, quoted in Lloyd 1904)

is and asgniintar incharait intan mbither in periculis
 COP then recognise.AUT.PL DEF.friends when be.AUT
 ‘then friends are recognised, when people are *in periculis*’

In the subsequent development the third person form changes from impersonal to canonical passive, so that the paradigm in its entirety becomes impersonal passive. This change is illustrated in (7) and (8). These examples are taken from two different versions of the same story. In both of the examples, the predicate is the autonomous form *ructha*, a third person plural form meaning ‘were brought’. In the older example (7), I will argue that the second argument is indicated by the morphology of this form (compare 4c). In the younger version (8), the second argument is expressed by the object pronoun *íat* – ‘them’. This clause-final object pronoun replaces the infixed pronoun both in the active and the autonomous (Strachan 1904; McCone 1987: 190-193).

7. Third person canonical passive (Chadwick 1927: 9 (1))

ructha chuci-sium isin m-bruidin
 bring.AUT.3PL to.3SG.M-EMPH in.DEF hall
 ‘they were brought to him in the hall’

8. Third person impersonal passive (Meyer 1894: 51 (51))

ructha chuigi-sium isin m-bruidin **íat**

In the Modern Irish period the subjectless impersonal passive is reanalysed as containing the active impersonal subject, leaving the active impersonal clause type as the main use of the autonomous verb in Modern Irish of today. I ask if an entirely subjectless impersonal passive verb form should be seen as marked and therefore prone to just such a reanalysis (cf. Blevins 2003: 481).

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