

The traditional treatment of passive sentences as patient-promotional is thought to be illustrated, for example, by languages with formally passive verbs which, in addition, exhibit affixed patients, and do not, furthermore, have an obligatory expression of the agent. This case seems to be exemplified by Indonesian (example 1). However, this treatment has been questioned on the basis of other languages, which seem to require an agent-demotional interpretation (cf. Shibatani 1985). In fact, both views are ultimately based on the Chomskyan analysis of passive sentences as transformations of active sentences.

However, agents, far from always being transformed subjects, can appear in the morphology even when the meaning is not active: some languages exhibit verbs which, although they have a passive meaning, contain a personal agent affix; an example is Latin *vapulo* “I am thrashed”. And conversely, there are languages in which the verb meaning “to be”, which would seem to rule out any passive form (since it expresses a state or an essence, and, consequently, does not have an active meaning), does, nevertheless, have a passive, and, thus, may suggest one to posit an agent (admittedly an impersonal one). Lithuanian is such a language, as illustrated by example 2.

Moreover, agent markers can serve as morphological elements through which passive verbs are formed: such passive verbs, when analyzed literally, appear as active subject-verb structures. This case is exemplified by such languages as Ainu or Kimbundu, in which the agent markers which make part of the structure of passive verbs are, in fact, first inclusive and third plural pronominal elements respectively (examples 3 and 4).

Some languages exhibit even more explicit agent-promotional structures. A well studied case is represented by anti-passive sentences (example 5, from Warrungu). We find another case in negative passive sentences that express the inability of the agent. An illustration is Japanese (example 6). Another is Hindi (ex. 7a and its neutral counterpart 7b). A third device stressing agent saliency consists of reduplicating the agent, first marked as an affix on the verb, but in addition also marked as an adverbial complement. We find this double agent-marking structure in such Mon-Khmer languages as Semai (example 8), and also in Austronesian languages, like Acehnese (example 9). Some verb-initial languages even offer a more striking, and rare, structure, i.e. a co-reference phenomenon between a pronominal agent and a sentence-final reflexive pronoun, as illustrated by Tagalog (example 10) or Toba Batak (example 11). Whereas there is a generalization that in simple sentences subjects control reflexivization, what we observe in these sentences is a reflexive pronoun which is itself the subject, and which expresses the same participant as the agent.

All these agent saliency phenomena may be opposed to passives with agent occultation, like the one found in such classical Semitic languages as Biblical Hebrew or Koranic Arabic: the latter is illustrated in example 12 (in which, following a rule in this language, there is no number agreement between the verb, *wu'ida* “was promised”, and the sentence-final subject (*a*)*l-muttaqu:n*, because the word-order is VS: literally, we have “the paradise which god-fearing men was (= “were”) promised).

Thus, agent occultation in passive sentences is, actually, in polar relationship with agent saliency, which can be considered to be the other pole in this continuum.

Examples for “PASSIVES WITH AGENT SALIENCY” (ALT 10, Leipzig, August 2013,
submitted oral presentation)

1. Indonesian (S. Wulandari, pers. comm.): *penjual ini di-teriak-i (oleh mahasiswa itu)* (seller this PASS.MARK.-scold.PRET-PAT.MARK.) (by student that) “this seller was scolded (by that student)”.
2. Lithuanian (Eckert 1999: 154): *jõ būta kareivio* (3MASC.SG.GEN) be(PASS.NEUT.PRET.PARTIC.) soldier(SG.GEN.) “he was a soldier”.
3. Ainu (Shibatani 1985: 824): *chip a-nukar* (ship 1INCL-see) “a ship is seen”.
4. Kimbundu (Givón 1981: 182): *nzua a-mu-mono kwa meme* (John 3PL.SUBJ.-3SG.OBJ.-see by me) “John was seen by me”.
5. Warrungu (Tsunoda 1988: 602): *ngaya nyaka-kali-n wurripa-wu katyarra-wu* (1SG.NOM. search-ANT.-NONFUT bee-DAT. opossum-DAT.) “I was looking for bees and opossums”.
6. Japanese (Shibatani 1985: 823) *boku wa nemur-are-nakat-ta* (1SG TOP sleep-PASS.-NEG.-PAST) “I could not sleep”.
7. Hindi (Davison 1982: 158): a. *mujh-se kuch bhī kahā nahī gayā* (1SG.-INSTR. nothing also say.PAST NEG PASS.PAST) “I couldn’t say anything”
b. *mañ-ne kuch bhī nahī kahā* (1SG.-ERG. nothing also NEG say.PAST) “I didn’t say anything”.
8. Semai (Diffloth 1974: 132) *tley-ʔajeh ʔnj- ca: la-ʔenj* (that-banana 1SG.-eat by-1SG.) “that banana was eaten by me”.
9. Acehnese (Durie 1988: 109): *jih lôn-peu-ingat lé lôn geu-peureksa lé dokto* (3FAM. 1SG.-CAUS.-remember by 1SG. 3POL.-examine by doctor) “he was reminded by me to be examined by the doctor”.
10. Tagalog (Schachter and Otnes 1972: 138): *s-in-ak-tan ko ang sarili-ko* (hurt-PASS.MARK.<-hurt-DIR 1SG.AG ART self-1SG.) “I hurt myself”.
11. Toba Batak (Keenan 2007: 126): *di-pukkul si Bissar diri-na* (PASS.MARK.-hit ART. Bissar self-his) “Bissar struck himself”.
12. Classical Arabic (Koran, XIII, 35): *mathalu l-ğannati (a)llati: wu’ida (a)l-muttaqu:n* (image.NOM ART-paradise(FEM).GEN REL.PR.FEM.SG promise.PASS.PAST.MASC.SG. ART.-God.fearing.men.NOM.PL) “Such is the paradise which was promised to those who fear God”.

References

- Davison, A., 1982, “On the form and meaning of Hindi passive sentences”, *Lingua*, 58, 149-189.
- Diffloth, G., 1974, “Body moves in Semai and in French”, in *Papers from the 10th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, Chicago, 128-138.
- Durie, M., 1988, “The so-called passive of Acehnese”, *Language*, 64, 104-113.
- Eckert, R., 1999, “Die Baltischen Sprachen”, in *Sprachen in Europa*, Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, 147-162.
- Givón, T., 1981, “Typology and functional domains”, *Studies in Language*, 5, 163-193.
- Keenan, E., 2007, « The syntax of subject-final languages », in W. Lehmann (ed.), in *Syntactic typology: Studies in the phenomenology of language*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 120-132.
- Schachter, P. and F. T. Otnes, 1972, *Tagalog Reference Grammar*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Shibatani, M., 1985, “Passives and related constructions”, *Language*, 61, 821-848.
- Tsunoda, T., 1988, “Antipassives in Warrungu and other Australian languages”, in M. Shibatani (ed.), *Passive and voice*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 595-651.