

Chapter 10

Passives

10.1 Lecture notes

Chapter 10, Lecture One

I. Passive and Linguistic Theory

- Passives have played a really central role in syntactic theorizing.
 - People have a very strong intuition of relatedness between active/passive pairs, and theories have tried to capture that.
 - Many languages have similar alternations — that is, where the NP that plays the role of object in the most basic sentences functions as the subject in a type of sentence that is marked as less basic in some way.
- Intuitively, there are (at least) a couple of different ways that you could conceptualize the realignment of grammatical roles inherent in the passive construction. You could think of it as promoting objects to subject (with subject demotion as a side-effect), or as demoting subjects (with object promotion as a side-effect).
- ? Which type of analysis is ours? (Subject demotion)
- ? Can you imagine any difference in the empirical predictions of the two types of analysis? (Subject demotion allows for the possibility of subject demotion without object promotion leading to subject-less passive sentences. Conversely, object promotion allows for

the possibility of object promotion without subject demotion — leading to sentences with two subjects.)

- A possible example comes from German. (1) shows that verbs in German don't obligatorily take specifiers. (2) is a passive of an intransitive verb. [**Slides:1–2**]

(1) Uns ist kalt
us[DAT] is cold
'We are cold'

(2) Hier wird nicht getanzt
here is not danced
'There is no dancing here'

- Classical Sanskrit had a similar construction: [**Slides:3**]

(3) Tvayā āsyatām
you-inst sit-3rd-sing-imp
'Let it be sat by you!'
(‘Please have a seat!’)

II. Passive in Our Grammar

- There are two parts to our analysis:
 - The Passive Lexical Rule
 - A passive entry for *be*
- Things to note about the lexical rule: [**Slides:4**]
 - The morphology is the same as for the past participle (form after *have*).
 - ? [FORM pass]. Why is it a HEAD feature? (So *be* will be able to select a VP[FORM pass] complement.)
 - ARG-ST shuffling, which translates into changing valence values (and hence constituent ordering) by the ARP.
 - The output of this rule is not limited in its distribution to contexts with *be*: [**Slides:5**]
- (4) a. The painting got stolen (by a thief).
b. Read by almost every high school sophomore, *Hamlet* may be the most well-known of Shakespeare's plays.

c. Anyone liked by that many people should surely run for office.

- Things to note about the entry for *be* [**Slides:6**]
 - It selects passive VPs (this is why it's a separate entry for now, but we'll come back to this).
 - It specifies subject sharing with its VP complement.
 - ? How is this done formally? (By tagging the SPR and the complement's SPR.)
 - ? Why doesn't this lead to sentences where the subject is realized twice? [**Slides:7**]
(5) *The dog was the dog bitten by the cat.
(Because this *be* specifically selects a complement that does not yet have its subject realized.)
 - It makes no contribution to semantics (other than what is added by present or past tense).
 - ? How is this done formally? (By tagging index and complement's index.)