THE WELSH IMPERSONAL

A middle ground

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PASSIVE PROBLEMS

What do we assume a passive is?

- · Subject suppression (deletion… demotion?)
- · Object promotion?
- · An agentive adjunct?
- · An alternate, 'active' verbal structure?

(1)   [the students] saw [the dog]

(2)   [the dog] was seen [by the students]

For simplicity and to match the current literature, our focus will be

- · the suppression of the active subject
- · not the realisation of the active subject as an adjunct
- · the feature, process or level at which passivization occurs

We will be following a particular Minimalist approach

Baker, Johnson & Roberts (1989) treat the passive as a morpheme.
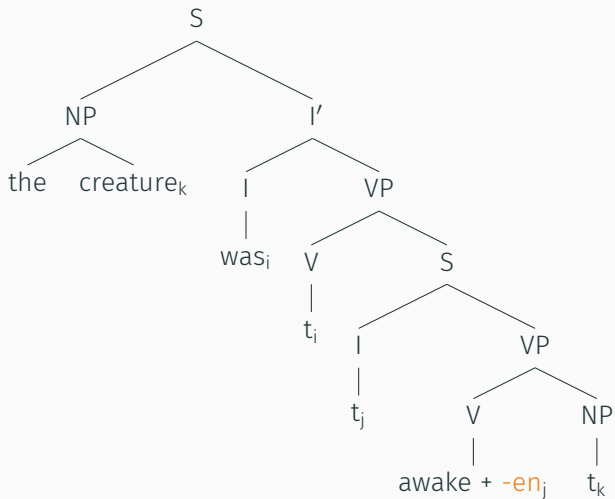Using data from English, they claim:

- · the passive morpheme (which they call -en) is an argument
- · this argument affixes to the verb as a syntactic clitic
- · this clitic argument takes case, as a 'normal' argument

(3)   the creature was awakened
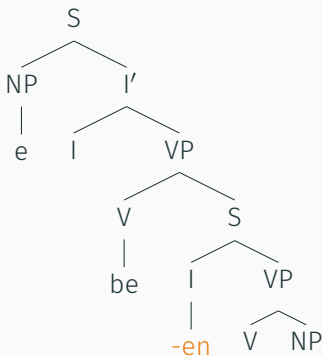
Figure: D-Structure passive (Baker, Johnson & Roberts, 1989)

Figure: S-Structure passive

WELSH DATA

Welsh passives?

The problem with Baker et al. (1989) is that it is too broad. Welsh has two constructions which might have the deep structure described but the two have different forms and implications

(4) cafodd neidr ei
get;PST.3SG snake POSS.3SG
gweld
F\see
'a snake was seen'

(5) gwel-wyd neidr
see-PST.IMPS snake
'a snake was seen'

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· One passive is *periphrastic* and behaves similarly to English
· One passive is *morphological* and is available in more contexts

The morphological passive can apply to both transitive and intransitive verbs

(5) gwelwyd neidr
see;PST.IMPS snake
'a snake was seen'

(6) rhedwyd yn aml
run;PST.IMPS ADV often
'people often ran'

- The subject is semantically present and interpreted as a generic unspecified person (SG/PL)
- An adjunct by-phrase can change this interpretation (it's complicated!)

(7) *Plyg-ir   gan Osian
       bend-PRS.IMPS by   Osian
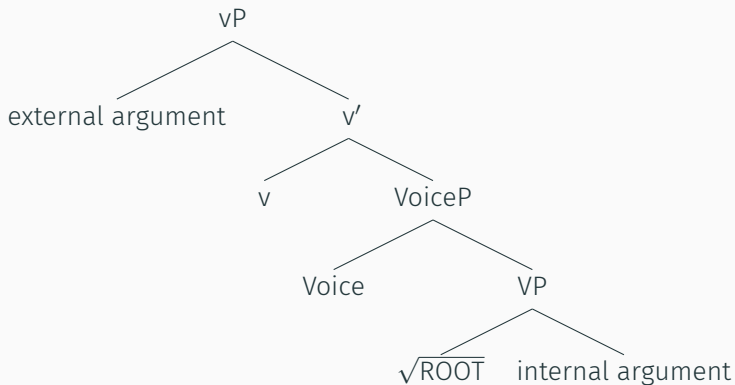   'Osian bends'

Whereas transitive verbs can take such agents, as illustrated here.

(8)   rhybuddi-wyd y   plant   gan Osian
       warn-PST.IMPS ART children by   Osian
       'the children were warned by Osian'

CURRENT APPROACHES

Alexiadou & Doron (2012)

Key idea: there are two non-active Voices available cross-linguistically, passive (π) and middle (μ). Based on data from Hebrew and Greek.

Figure: Basic structure of derivations

Two types of element may occur in the Voice head position. (When the sentence is active, this phrasal layer is not present.)
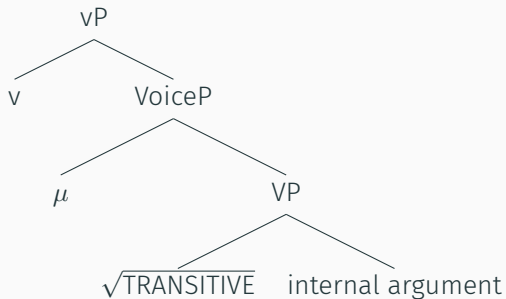
- Passive (π):
    - Syntax: saturates the external argument slot by stipulating that v (above Voice) be introduced, but that the external argument can't be introduced syntactically
    - Semantics: existentially binds the external participant (Alexiadou & Doron, 2012, 4)
- Middle (μ): changes the requirements of the verb root.
    - With roots that select for an external argument: prevents the insertion of that argument (except as PP)
    - With unaccusative roots: introduces an agentive human argument

"In cases where the root does not require an external argument, active Voice morphology describes an event without an external cause/agent. Accordingly, there is no reason for merging either middle or passive morphology to achieve the reduction of the external argument. If such morphology is nevertheless merged, then, for economy reasons, this is only appropriate if the active is less informative, i.e. if the described event has an external argument after all. This argument must be interpreted as agent, which is the default theta role assigned when the root is not the element which selects the external argument." (Alexiadou & Doron, 2012, 5)

Figure: Derivation with transitive root

Syntactic insertion of anything in SpecvP is blocked. Unergatives behave similarly, but with no internal argument.
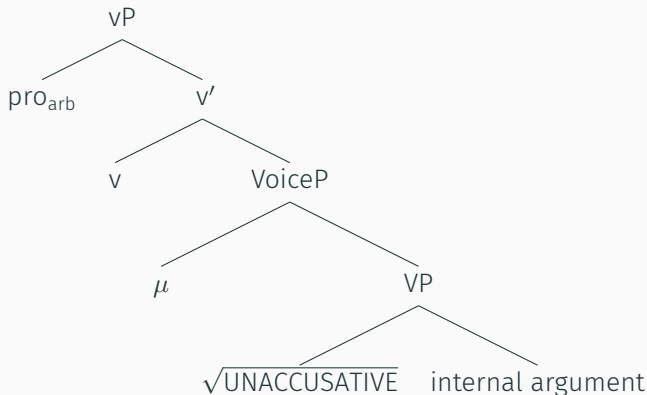
Figure: Derivation with unaccusative root

pro_{arb} is inserted in SpecvP (our interpretation!).

CONSEQUENCES FOR WELSH

Our proposal: the Welsh periphrastic passive is a true passive involving the passive head π, whereas the Welsh impersonal is a mediopassive involving the middle voice head μ.

Advantageous consequence: the difference between the (active-like) behaviour of impersonals of unaccusatives and the (passive-like) behaviour of impersonals of transitives falls out from this approach, since the effect of μ depends on what kind of verb it combines with.

Welsh, like Hebrew and Greek, consistently distinguishes π from μ morphologically.

Tests from Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2015, 40) (used for the Icelandic New Construction):

pro_arb should be able to combine with unaccusative verbs.

(9) dioddef-ir   yn ofnadwy mewn rhyfel-oedd
     suffer-PRS.IMPS ADV terrible   in   war-PL
     'people suffer terribly during wars'

pro_arb derivations should be incompatible with an agentive by-phrase (since there is already an implicit agent)

(10) *Plyg-ir   gan Osian
       bend-PRS.IMPS by   Osian
       'Osian bends'

INTERESTING IMPLICATIONS 1: MORPHOLOGY

Alexiadou & Doron (2012, 24) summarize the morphology used for different derivations in English, Greek and Hebrew:

Language	Anticaus.	Reflexive	Disp. mid.	Mediop.	Passive
Greek	μ Nact	μ Nact	μ Nact	μ Nact	–
Hebrew	μ MID	μ MID	μ MID	μ MID	π PASS
English	μ Active	μ Active	μ Active	–	π PASS

In these three languages, the same morphology is used with all types of 'middle' derivations (though this is not a logical necessity in A&D's theory).

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Welsh	? Active	? Active	? Active	μ IMPS	π PASS

In these three languages, the same morphology is used with all types of 'middle' derivations (though this is not a logical necessity in A&D's theory). Welsh presents a new type, in which the expression of μ may vary – or else μ is not consistently present in middle derivations in Welsh (and English?).

In Hebrew, the mediopassive reading of the middle morphology is blocked if the passive is available (Alexiadou & Doron, 2012, 11–14)

(11) ha-gader porqa   al-yedey ha-mafginim
      the-wall dismantle.INTNS.PASS by   the-demonstrators
      'the wall was dismantled by the demonstrators'

(12) *ha-gader hitparqa   al-yedey ha-mafginim
       the-wall dismantle.INTNS.MID   by   the-demonstrators
       'the wall fell apart by the demonstrators'

In Welsh, this is not the case (cf. (4) vs. (5)).

  · May be a consequence of the availability of an anticausative
    reading in Hebrew (see previous slide)
  · May be to do with a morphological 'blocking effect' not found
    with the Welsh periphrastic passive

- The Welsh impersonal and periphrastic passives are structurally different, despite functional similarities.
- The intransitive impersonals are evidence of this.
- The analysis presented in Alexiadou & Doron (2012) can capture this difference

Issues for Alexiadou & Doron (2012)

Our data implies that middle head is not a unified phenomenon, cross-linguistically, as implied by their data

Alexiadou, Artemis & Edit Doron. 2012. The syntactic construction of two non-active voices: passive and middle. Journal of Linguistics 48(01). 1–34. `http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0022226711000338`.

Baker, Mark, Kyle Johnson & Ian Roberts. 1989. Passive arguments raised. Linguistic Inquiry 20(2). pp. 219–251. `http://www.jstor.org/stable/4178625`.

Maling, Joan & Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir. 2015. From passive to active: stages in the Icelandic new impersonal. In Theresa Biberauer & George Walkden (eds.), Syntax over time: lexical, morphological, and information-structural interactions, vol. 15 Oxford Studies in Diachronic and Historical Linguistics, 36–53. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

QUESTIONS?

OUTLINE

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