Formal Approach to Passive Voice

- **Concerns:**
  - Why is the passive structure grammatical?
  - How to explain the structure of passive voice?

- **Explanations:**
  - Case filter
  - Theta marking
  - NP-movement
  - Trigger: the passive morphology

- **Questions**
  - Can structure explain structure?
  - No explanation of the passive morphology itself:
    - Why BE + PP
Functional Approach to Passive Voice

Concerns:
- Why is active/passive distinguished?
- When would passive be used?
- What are the functional correlates?

Explanation: form \( \rightarrow \) function
- Pragmatic motivation
- Semantic motivation

Questions
- Are there other constructions similar in detransitivization?
- Why only ‘Direct Object’ gets promoted?
Functional Approach to Passive Voice

- Pragmatic functions involve:
  - Perspective of the event: who’s in control?
  - Topicality of participants: who is important?

- Semantic functions involve:
  De-transitivization:
  - Demotion of Agent
  - Promotion of Non-Agent
  - Verb stativization
Three Types of Voice

- Active voice
- Passive voice
- Antipassive voice
  - Ex. He ate.
  - He drinks.
Functional Dimensions of Voice

The semantics of transitive event:

- **Agent**: a volitional, controlling, actively-initiating agent.

- **Patient**: non-volitional, inactive non-controlling patient who registers the event’s changes-of-state, and thus is it’s **salient effect**.

- **Verb**: an event that is compact (non-durative), bounded (non-lingering), sequential (non-perfect) and realis (non-hypothetical).
The Pragmatics of Voice

- Perspective and topicality
  - Who is in control?
  - Who is important?
  - Who are you talking about?
Three main functional dimensions of de-transitive voice:

- Agent demotion
- Promotion of a non-agent
- Verb stativization
Agent Demotion-motivations

The agent may be:

- **Unknown**
  - ex: “…He was killed in the Boer war…”

- **Predictable**
  - ex: “**The soldiers** invaded the village…Soon the entire place was burned down.”

- **Given in the subsequent discourse**
  - ex: “…There was no telling what might happened if he had not been interrupted.

  **The dog** had been whimpering and whining…”
Agent Demotion

- **Predictable on general grounds**
  
  ex: “The plane was brought down safely.”

- **Universal and thus left unspecified**
  
  ex: “…as everybody knew, dogs were psychic… Now, it was known that these were actually fifth-dimensional objects…”

- **Deliberately suppressed to avoid culpability**
  
  ex: “Finally she said: “A long, long time ago, before I was born…He got into a fight then, when he was young, and a man was killed. But he was a wild boy then, and drunk. Now he is and old man. He doesn’t drink now. Not for years”…”
Demotion of agent

- The agent may be predictable as the author of text
  ex: “…Enough has been said here of a subject which will be treated more fully in a subsequent chapter…”

- The agent may simply be unimportant
  - Impersonal subject
  ex: “They found her nude body on the beach last night”
Impersonal-subject Constructions

- The agent is unimportant
  - Non-specific
  - Not individuated

ex: “They found her nude body on the beach last night.”
Promotion of Non-agent

Promotional de-transitive constructions:

- **Be-passive:**
  
  John was killed in an accident.

- **Get-passive:**
  
  Mary got elected on her second try.

- **Middle voice:**
  
  The window suddenly broke.

- **Potential middle:**
  
  This book is eminently readable.
Promotion of Non-agent

Non-promotional de-transitive constructions:

- They found **him** lying on the beach half dead.
- One doesn’t chew **tobacco** in polite company.
- You can find **cheap housing** there.
Verb Stativization

- An event that is framed in the active voice is typically agent-initiated, sharply-bounded, fast-changing process. In the passive voice, the same event can be re-framed as a resulting state.

- Ex:
  a) The use of the auxiliary verb “be” as the main verb in the passive construction.
  b) The use of a less-finite — adjectival, perfect, participial — verb-form.
Manipulation verbs

- Tend to reject semantically-stative verbs in their complements, and accept only active verbs.

  - **Active**
    - She told him *to go to sleep.*

  - **Adjectival-stative**
    - *She told him to be asleep.*

  - **Adjectival-stative**
    - *She told him to be tall.*

  - **Progressive-stative**
    - *She told him to be going to sleep.*
Manipulative verbs reject passive-voice complements

- She made John chop the wood.
- *She made the wood be chopped (by John).
- They asked her to leave her husband.
- *They asked her husband to be left (by her).
- John, go find Mary!
- *Mary, go be found (by John)!
The Frequency-distribution of Voice

- The active (main, declarative, affirmative) clause is the basic, simple, unmarked clause-type.
# The Frequency-distribution of Voice

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