



## The Passive and the Notion of Transitivity

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show that passivization can be better accounted for when the phenomenon of transitivity, on which it is based, is defined on semantic grounds. The notion of transfer from the subject to the object through the verb, which corresponds to the main semantic component of transitivity, is what makes passivization possible, not necessarily the presence of an object complement of the verb in the active. It appears that the notion of object, which is the main syntactic parameter on which the notion of transitivity is founded, covers very different situations and cannot serve as a reliable tool to describe the phenomenon of passivization. It is only when the transitivity notion is envisaged through a semantic angle that passivization can be accounted for in more homogeneous terms.

**Keywords:** Active, Passive, Passivization, Transitivity, Transfer, Object complement, Syntax, Semantics

### 1. Preliminary remarks

The passive is traditionally described as being based on the phenomenon of syntactic transitivity. If the verb is followed by an object complement, then the utterance can be passivized. Quirk et al. (1985, pp. 159-171), (Note 1) and Huddleston & Pullum (2002, p. 1431) (Note 2) for instance, underline that transitive verb sentences can be either active or passive, that 'Most verbs taking just one object permit passivation :

*The hail damaged the car.*

*The car was damaged by the hail.'*

They add that in addition to copula (*he is at home*) and intransitive verbs (*he is running*), which having no object cannot take the passive, a closed category of verbs or verbal phrases, which are most of the time transitive verbs used statively or stative verbs do not occur in the passive: *resemble/look like/take after someone ; suit/fit/become ; have /possess/lack ; number/hold ; mean ; mind ; boast ; befall ; fail (let down) ; cost/weigh ; marry/meet ; agree with.*

1. *They have a nice house.*
2. *He lacks confidence.*
3. *The auditorium holds 1500 people.*
4. *The dress becomes you.*
5. *John resembles his father.*
6. *His son took after him.*
7. *Will that suit you ?*
8. *The coat does not fit you.*
9. *This resort boasts the best beaches on the east coast.*
10. *He weighs a lot.*
11. *The enemy numbered over 20,000.*
12. *Three squared equals nine.*
13. *I don't think they mind your criticism.*
14. *A strange adventure befell him.*

15. *He failed her.* (= 'he let her down'.)
16. *John married her in June.*
17. *I met John in the street.*
18. *Mary agreed with Paul.*

These verbs can be divided into two sets:

*Resemble, have, mean, mind, fit, cost, weigh, measure, lack, hold, etc.* (set 1)

*Marry, meet* (set 2)

As the examples below show, these verbs permit passivization in one of their senses, when the subject of the active is agentive or partly agentive, i.e. when they refer to a process (set 1) and/or when they cease to be reciprocal (set 2):

1. *John has a book. \*a book is had (by John). I've been had again. (They had me again.) A good time was had by all. (We all had a good time.)*
2. *The suit fits me. \*I'm fitted by this suit. I was fitted by the tailor. (The tailor fitted me.)*
3. *The car weighs two tons. \*Two tons are weighed by this car. The letter was weighed by John. (John weighed the letter.)*
4. *The patio measures just 7 feet across. \*Just 7 feet across are measured by the patio. The level of anticoagulant in the blood, which is measured by a number called the INR, is hard to control. (Note 3) (A number called INR measures the level of anticoagulant in the blood.)*
5. *This auditorium holds 500 people. \*500 people are held by this auditorium. The cup was held by the winner. (The winner held the cup.)*
6. *Mary married John. \*John was married by Mary. John was married by the preacher. (The preacher married John.)*
7. *Mary met John in the street. \*John was met by Mary in the street. John was met by Mary at the station. (The meeting was scheduled.) (John met Mary at the station.) An accident was likely to be met in the course of the air voyage. (meet = happen)*

All these sentences are in the simple present. The utterer merely validates the relation between the grammatical subject and the predicate, and presents what he is saying as true in itself, independent of any particular point of view.

The verbs belonging to set 1 (*Resemble, have, mean, fit, cost, weigh, etc.*) have a stative value (or are used statively). Even though the structures are syntactically based on a pattern with 3 parts, and the verbs are followed by complements that have more or less the status of objects (« me » in « it fits me » can be regarded as a syntactic object but certainly not « a lot » in « he weighs a lot », which is only a complement of the verb without being an object), (Note 4) they are **semantically binary**, just as copula clauses are (S + V) : there is one argument only (the subject) and a property of the subject is given. And this is what makes passivization impossible : utterances containing such verbs are used to attribute a property to the subject ; if the verb functions as a copula and is semantically binary (if the verb has one argument only, like intransitive verbs), the passive excluded. Besides, all the verbs belonging to set 1 function as *be* and some of them could even be replaced by it. Their binary semantic structure is identical to any utterance containing *be* (even though the meaning would be slightly different) :

*It costs 10 pounds ≈ it is ten pounds.*

*He resembles his mother ≈ he is like his mother, he is similar to his mother in appearance.*

*The suit fits me ≈ the suit is my size.*

*I have a car ≈ the car is mine.*

*It means a lot to me ≈ it is important to me.*

*Marry* and *meet* (by chance), belonging to set 2, which are reciprocal verbs, are clearly followed by object complements. The status of what follows them is not unstable. Their pattern consists of 3 parts (*he married her* : *her* is the object complement of the verb) but the object cannot become subject because it cannot be promoted, both participants acting upon one another (reciprocal diathesis): *He married her. \*She was married by him.* The passive could only be used with a different meaning: *she was married by him* : *by him* = *by the priest*. There is no reciprocal relationship anymore. Let's take *meet* :

*John met her in the street. \*She was met by John in the street.* (The meeting was not scheduled.)

*John met Mary at the station. John was met by Mary at the station.* (The meeting was scheduled.)

If one participant acts upon the other and vice versa, the structure is semantically binary too. It is as if there were only one argument since the object cannot be promoted.

It transpires that the syntactic division of the predicative relation does not necessarily correspond to its semantic division :

• **Syntactic division :**

This suit fits me

1            2        3

**Semantic division :**

This suit fits me. Property of the subject. No passive correspondent

1            2

• **Syntactic division :**

The car weighs two tons. No passive correspondent

1            2        3

**Semantic division :**

The car weighs two tons

1            2

• **Correspondence between syntactic division and semantic division :**

The tailor fitted me. —> I was fitted by the tailor.

1            2        3            1        2        3

To sum up, there are 2 kinds of verbs that cannot be passivized :

- those that are synonyms of *be* (attribution of a property to the subject, set 1.) : *weigh, cost, have, mean, fit, resemble*, etc., whose subject is never agentive. The complement of the active cannot become subject of the passive since the object cannot be promoted, both participants being equal (A=B). The complement of the verb functions as a property of the subject.

- those that are reciprocal verbs (set 2.): *marry, meet (by chance)*. The object cannot be promoted, both participants acting upon one another.

All these verbs are syntactically based on a pattern with 3 parts, but semantically, for different reasons, they are binary. (Note 5)

**Conclusion :** Some verbs are transitive and followed by object complements (except for *weigh, hold, number, cost*, which are, in one of their uses, followed by complements of the verb which cannot be described as objects) and cannot be passivized. In some of their uses, these verbs show a discrepancy between form (ternary pattern, pattern with 3 parts) and meaning (binary pattern). This difficulty makes it necessary to examine the notion of transitivity in further detail. The notion of object complement will be questioned as well.

**2. The notion of transitivity**

Huddleston and Pullum (2002, p. 247) (Note 6) sustain that « If a core complement NP of an active clause can be converted into the subject of a related passive, then it is an object. » This corresponds to what they call « the passive test ». The object of an active clause prototypically corresponds to the subject of a related passive :

*Pat overlooked the error. [O]*

*The error [S] was overlooked (by Pat).*

The authors add that there are exceptions to the rule and that the subject of the passive does not always correspond to the object of the verb in the active. In the following example, *this glass* corresponds to the subject of the passive, but « it is functioning as complement of a preposition, not as object of *drink* » :

*He has drunk out of this glass.*

*This glass has been drunk out of.*

In other words, the passive test is not always perfectly reliable as there are intransitive structures that permit passivization.

In fact, there are 4 possible combinations:

➔ **Active transitive sentence with a passive correspondent**, typical occurrences: *the hail damaged the car. The car was damaged by the hail.*

➔ **Active transitive sentence without a passive correspondent** : *he resembles his father.*

→ **Active intransitive sentence without a passive correspondent** : *someone has slept under this bed.*

→ **Active intransitive sentence with a passive correspondent**: *someone has slept in this bed.*

As can be noted, the notion of syntactic transitivity works on the whole but is not entirely relevant, as many cases are left unaccounted for.

To put it simply, there are two kinds of definitions of transitivity: formal definitions, mainly based on syntactic grounds, and other definitions based on semantics, and more particularly on the meaning of the term « transitive » and the manifold situations that it covers.

### 2.1 Syntactic definition

According to traditional grammars, a **transitive verb involves two participants and contains one object (direct or indirect)**. (Note 7) Useful as it might be, this clear-cut definition is not entirely satisfactory because the notion of object is highly problematic as the word covers a whole array of different situations.

#### 2.1.1 Direct transitive verbs

1. *He dug a grave* : the object is « effected », and clearly points to a result : *a grave is dug*. The action is telic, (Note 8) i.e. viewed from its endpoint. The activity is viewed as completed.
2. *He dug the ground* : the object is affected ; the action is atelic because it is only partially carried out.
3. *He ran the marathon in 3 hours*: the noun phrase (*the marathon*) refers to a distance but functions as an object (*run a race*) ; there is a passive correspondent (the passive test works here). The action is telic, viewed from its endpoint. The object is effected.
4. *The whole choir sang the wrong words* : *the wrong words* corresponds to the object of the verb (affected object) but the adjective *wrong* prevents passivization : *\*the wrong words were sung by the whole choir. The words were sung by the whole choir* is perfectly acceptable.
5. *He was thinking lewd thoughts* : *lewd thoughts* occupies the place of an object but the verb *think* does not refer to an opinion here as in *we are all thinking the same thing*, but to something that the subject has in mind : *he had lewd thoughts in mind*. If *lewd thoughts* is an object, it can only be indirectly so as the sentence constitutes a reduced form of *he was thinking about lewd things* (the word *things* being replaced by *thoughts*, which is reduplication of *think*, producing a ‘summary effect’). Passivization is impossible here.
6. *He kicked the bucket*: if this sentence is interpreted literally, *the bucket* is the object complement of the verb *kick* and is affected. But *the bucket* cannot be described as a direct object when the expression is interpreted idiomatically. The sentence allows the passive in its literal sense only and does not allow the passive in its figurative sense. Indeed, *the bucket was kicked (by him)* would be interpreted literally. *The bucket* and *kick* are perceived as a single lexical item when they are interpreted idiomatically. This is the reason why *the bucket* cannot be the object complement of *kick* even though the structure seems to imply the opposite. The clause is thus intransitive.
7. *It looked like rain but I decided to chance it and left my umbrella at home*: the object *it* has no reference and is devoid of meaning (or rather its semantic value can be deduced from the context). It is part of a fixed expression. No passive correspondent can be thought of (*\*It was chanced by him*) because the subject of the passive must be discourse-old and have a clear referential value. (Note 9)
8. *He has a car* : the noun phrase *a car* is an object complement and yet no passive is possible because *have* functions as a stative verb here.
9. *He gave her a book* : *her* has the status of an indirect object for certain linguists, who consider this structure as derived from *He gave a book to her*. But it is regarded as a direct object for others, who only take the surface structure into account.
10. *John shaved himself* : *himself* is the co-referential object of the verb *shave*. The structure is ternary but reflexive expressions cannot be passivized : a reflexive pronoun cannot become the subject of a sentence if it appears on its own : *\*Himself was shaved by John*. The pronoun can only be used if it is part of a larger group : *Unflattering descriptions of himself have been banned by our president*. (Jackendoff). Reflexive pronouns are very seldom part of agent by-phrases. They must be rhematic or appear in a coordinated clause : *you are hereby advised by Mary and myself that we are married*. (Note 10)
11. *John broke a tooth on a particularly tough piece of meat*: (Note 11) *a tooth* is the object complement of the verb *break* but as the object is a part of the subject (co-referential) and that the subject (*John*) is not at all agentive, the utterance cannot be passivized (*\*A tooth was broken by John on a particularly tough piece of meat*.) A parallel can be drawn with reflexive diathesis here (example 10), as reflexive expressions cannot be passivized : *he washed himself / \*himself was washed by him*.

12. *He married her* : *her* is an object but the passive is impossible because of the reciprocal meaning of the verb.

It appears that the notion of syntactic transitivity is not easy to grasp. The link between the passive and the notion of syntactic transitivity is based on shaky foundations. Therefore Huddleston and Pullum's statement (« most verbs taking just one object permit passivization») should be qualified, as it rests on syntactic grounds only.

### 2.1.2 Indirect transitive verbs or prepositional verbs

Prepositional verbs can often occur in the passive, but not so freely as in the active. They consist of a lexical verb followed by a preposition :

*My mother approved of **the plan**. **The plan** was approved (of) by my mother. (of is optional here)*  
*The committee didn't face up to **these problems**. **These problems** weren't faced up to by the committee.*  
*The organisers seem to have lost sight of **the main goal**. **The main goal** seems to have been lost sight of.*  
 (Note 12)

According to Jacques Roggero's classification (1981, pp. 15-28), (Note 13) a prepositional verb is a transitive verb followed by an indirect object complement. The preposition is stranded in the passive but it is strictly specified by the verb at the same time as it introduces the noun phrase.

Let's take *go into*:

*The engineers [went [carefully] into the problem]: go into is a prepositional verb, used idiomatically here ; into the problem is the indirect object complement and the prepositional phrase (PP) is part of the verb phrase. A passive counterpart can easily be found : the problem was carefully gone into.*

*The engineers [went] [carefully][into the tunnel.]: the verb is not prepositional here but simple (go), and it is followed by a prepositional phrase. The verb is used non idiomatically and the PP into the tunnel is an adjunct, which is external to the verb phrase. No passive counterpart can be thought of : \*The tunnel was gone into.*

In a nutshell, *go into* is regarded as an idiom when it is used figuratively (*go into a problem*) but not when it is used literally: *go into a tunnel*. It is followed by an indirect object complement when it is used idiomatically (in that case it is a prepositional verb) and by an adjunct when it is used non idiomatically (*go* is not a prepositional verb in that case; it is just followed by a prepositional phrase). As a consequence, there is a great cohesion between the verb and the preposition when the meaning is figurative, but not when it is literal, since the verb is simple in that case.

Talmy Givón (1990) (Note 14) goes in the same direction underlining that some verb-preposition combinations are partly idiomatic (*go into, approve of, etc.*) :

#### 1. Idiomatic

*They cared for her well during her last year. (s'occuper de)*

*She was well cared for during her last year.*

#### 2. Non-idiomatic :

*John cared for her deeply. (aimer)*

*\*she was deeply cared for by John.*

He explains the contrasting behaviour of the idiomatic vs. non-idiomatic sense by noting that idiomatic verb-preposition combinations are perceived as **single lexical items**. We might add that this is not so much a question of idiomaticity (as some idiomatic expressions cannot be passivized precisely because they are idiomatic and function as a whole [*set sails, lose courage, change trains, etc.*]) (Note 15) as it is a question of link between the verb and the preposition. In 1, the verb is highly prepositional (*to care for someone, s'occuper de*) ; the link between the verb and the preposition is very close and the prepositional phrase cannot be deleted without any change of meaning (*\*he cared*). In 2., the verb is still prepositional (*to care, aimer*) but the link between the verb and the preposition is not so close. The prepositional phrase can be deleted without changing the meaning of the verb. As a matter of fact, both verbs are prepositional, both are followed by indirect object complements but one of them cannot be passivized because the link between the verb and the preposition is not close enough. But there might be another reason : *care for* is a stative verb and stative verbs cannot normally be passivized. If we compare *John cared for her to They wrote a lot about it*, we note that both verbs are simple and show but a loose link with their PP (which can be deleted, *John cared, they wrote*) but only the verb *write* can be passivized. This might come from the fact that *write* is an actional verb. This question will be examined further on.

To conclude, only in their abstract, figurative uses do *go into, look at, arrive at, etc.* accept the passive because the preposition in such cases is specified by the verb. It is then perfectly natural that the passive should normally be

excluded when the preposition is less constrained, especially when it introduces an adjunct and has a temporal or a locative meaning:

*We never worked on Sundays. \*Sundays were never worked on.*

*They set out despite the fog. \*The fog was set out despite.*

*They had died near the tree. \*The tree had been died near.*

But there are counter-examples, which we will analyse further on : it is sometimes possible to passivize an utterance when the preposition is not specified by the verb, when it introduces an adjunct and has a locative meaning, if the PP functions as if it were a complement of the verb, as if it were affected by the process :

*This bed has been slept in.*

*He hates being sat next to.*

*The bridge has already been flown under twice.* (Note 16)

Also, the fact that a preposition is specified by a verb or verbal idiom is no guarantee that the verb can be passivized:

*His son took after him (tenir de).* This sentence is semantically close to *his son resembled him*. When passivized, it takes on a different meaning and is interpreted literally: *He was taken after his son* means *il a été pris après son père*. *After his son* becomes an adjunct in the passive, and the verb is not prepositional anymore. So *He was taken after his son* cannot be the passive equivalent of *His son took after him*, which cannot be passivized in that sense.

*They are crying out for justice. \*Justice is being cried out for.* (*cry out for justice* functions as a close unit, as a fixed expression like *set sails, change buses*, etc.). The passive is not possible for many idioms in which the verb and the object form a close unit. (See note 15).

## 2.2 Semantic definition of transitivity

When the notion of transitivity, which originates in semantics, (Note 17) is defined semantically, the syntactic definition is presupposed (transitivity entails the presence of an object) but what comes uppermost is the idea of **semantic transfer. The action is transferred, carried-over, from the subject (which is more or less agentive, which can be animate or not) to the object (the patient, which can be more or less effective) through the verb.** (Note 18) As Georges Lazard underlines (1994, p. 248), « La transitivité sémantique, conformément à l'étymologie du terme, évoque l'idée de quelque chose qui passe (transit) d'un participant à l'autre, de l'agent à l'objet. » (Note 19)

The notion of transitivity is especially relevant when an action is involved, when the verb is dynamic and the subject agentive (whether animate or not), which permits the transfer :

*Peter shot Paul. Paul was shot by Peter.*

*Peter* is the performer of the action « shot ».

*The official weighed the boxer. The boxer was weighed by the official.*

*The bullet hit him in the neck. He was hit in the neck by a bullet.* (agentive inanimate subject, « bullet » performer of the action « hit »)

With a dynamic transitive prepositional verb (V+NP+PP), the transfer normally affects the first NP :

*John explained the situation to us. The situation was explained to us.*

But it is not unusual for the noun in the PP to be affected :

- *He paid too much for this car.*

- *Well, lots of things are paid too much for nowadays.* (Note 20) *Too much* should be the subject of the passive (*pay money for something*) but *for this car*, that is to say what we pay for, is taken to be the theme of the utterance here and is affected.

If we consider a more complex verb (a prepositional expression) like for example *Make mention of*, we note that the NP, *mention*, is normally affected by the transfer : *mention is made of the whole tradition in aesthetics grounded in Kant and Hegel.* (Note 21) *\*The whole tradition in aesthetics grounded in Kant and Hegel was made mention of.* But in the following example, the noun in the PP (indirect object complement) is affected as it is thematized in the context :

*He did not make mention of his links with the mafia, and I do not think that they will ever be made mention of.* (Note 22)

The transfer normally affects the first complement of the verb, but the second can be affected too if it is thematized in context.

The passive is consequently generally not allowed when there is no transfer possible (with stative verbs for instance or verbs used statively), even if the sentence contains a syntactic object :

1. *I'll chance it.* (No transfer because « it » is non-referential.)
2. *He has a car.* (No transfer. Stative value of the verb)
3. *John broke a tooth on a particularly tough piece of meat.* (No transfer. Co-referentiality between part of the object and the subject. Sort of reflexive diathesis.)
4. *John shaved himself.* (No transfer. Reflexive diathesis)
5. *He married her.* (Reciprocal diathesis)
6. *He kicked the bucket.* (idiom = *to die*) (No transfer. Single lexical item)

The idea of transfer on which transitivity is based presupposes that the subject of the active is agentive. In fact, the subject of the active can be more or less agentive. The degree of agentivity of the subject is variable and depends on the verb as well. **The notion of agentivity can thus be described as a *continuum*, and as a consequence the notion of transitivity as well.** In the following examples, the subject is decreasingly agentive, the degree of transitivity lower and lower (but never absent), and in each case the passive is possible: (Note 23)

1. *John willingly broke the vase.* (*willingly* plays a role in the agentive role of the subject, John, and in the dynamic character of the verb *break*)
2. *John accidentally broke the vase.* (the subject is necessarily less agentive due to the role of the adverb *accidentally*, despite the presence of the same dynamic verb)
3. *The wind broke the branch of the tree.* (inanimate subject ; the subject is necessarily less agentive than with an animate subject (John))
4. *A broken wall girdled the low horizon.* (the verb *girdle* is stative, the subject is inanimate. But there is some sort of dynamism since *a broken wall* acts upon *the low horizon* by girdling it. The subject is only indirectly agentive here, and the degree of transitivity is very low.

All these utterances have a passive counterpart no matter how agentive the subject is:

1. *The vase was willingly broken by John.*
2. *The vase was accidentally broken by John.*
3. *The branch of the tree was broken by the wind.*
4. *I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary churchyard, with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide.* (Note 24)

But when the subject is not associated with the role of agent at all, there's normally no transfer possible from the subject to the object through the verb, and passivization is hardly acceptable :

1. *He received the letter. ?The letter was received by him.*
2. *The boxer weighed 140 pounds. \*140 were weighed by the boxer.*
3. *The suit fits me. \*I am fitted by the suit. (the suit is not agentive)*
4. *He kicked the bucket. (he died) \*The bucket was kicked by him.*
5. *His wound was oozing blood. \*Blood was being oozed from his wound.*
6. *The bush sprouted new shoots. \*New shoots were being sprouted from the bush.*
7. *The reforms will benefit women. \*Women will be benefited by the reforms.*

The subject is not agentive. The object can't be affected by the subject through the verb. No transfer is possible. (Note 25)

In fact, like agentivity, **transitivity functions as a *continuum*** : the more effective an action is, the more transitive the clause is. If the action is not viewed from its endpoint, it is less effectively transferred to a patient. Moreover, the transitivity notion is not homogeneous and is made up of different semantic parameters, which are discourse-determined, and have to be taken into account. A verb can be more or less transitive if :

- it refers to an action which is punctual (punctual actions have a more marked effect on their patients)
- if the action is telic (the object is effected)
- if the action is atelic (the object partially effected)

- if the verb is volitional (the effect on the patient is more apparent)
- if the subject is high in agency (which favours the transfer)
- if the object is affected completely.

All these parameters have to be considered to define the notion of transitivity. The more agentive the subject is, the more telic the verb, the more effective the object is likely to be and the higher the degree of transitivity.

It follows that a verb is not intrinsically high in transitivity but that it can be more or less so according to the context. That is the reason why purely formal definitions of transitivity are too restrictive. In order for an utterance to be passivized, there must be some degree of semantic transitivity. But our definition of transitivity has yet to be clarified.

### 3. Transitivity as a semantic *continuum*

**Semantic transitivity does not always presuppose syntactic transitivity (the presence of an object) and syntactic transitivity does not necessarily trigger the transitive meaning.** As far as the passive is concerned, the syntactic factor is not absolute. Some clauses may contain an object without conveying any idea of transfer from the subject to the object, making passivization impossible. As Claude Rivière points out (1997, p. 20), « la transitivité est un phénomène qui se place au niveau des relations entre actants plutôt qu'au niveau des relations syntaxiques visibles. » (Note 26)

**In other words, certain verbs can be syntactically transitive (SVO) without being semantically transitive**, without implying any idea of transfer from the subject to the object through the verb. This is the case for stative verbs (*he received the letter, the suit fits me*): actions can be transferred from one participant to another, states cannot. The pattern with three parts plays a role in the definition of transitivity of course but what generally comes first is the semantic idea of transfer which permits passivization. The idea of transfer presupposes a certain dynamism of the verb and implies that the object is more or less affected by the subject through the verb. The passive will only be possible when the verb is semantically transitive in a given context. True passives **are thus passives producing an agentive effect**, passives containing dynamic verbs, because the notion of transfer is fully relevant here. The more agentive the subject is, the more dynamic the verb is, the **higher degree of transitivity** and consequently of passiveness the sentence will contain :

*He dug a hole and planted the tree.* Syntactic transitivity AND semantic transitivity. Passive correspondent. The transfer is carried out in its entirety. (Note 27)

*I have a car.* Syntactic transitivity (SVO) but NO semantic transitivity. Attribution of a property to the subject. NO Passive correspondent.

*He married her.* Syntactic transitivity but NO semantic transitivity. The object is affected by the subject at the same time as it affects the subject. The object cannot be promoted as it is acted upon as well as it acts (upon the subject). Reflexive diathesis.

*We all had a good time.* Syntactic transitivity AND semantic transitivity. Passive correspondent : *A good time was had by all.* *A good time* is not affected but it is effected and has a clear resultative value. The tense of the verb and the nature of the process denoted by the verb certainly have something to do with transitivity here. If the verb is put into the present tense, the utterance becomes hardly acceptable : *We are all having a good time.*

? *A good time is being had by us all.* The aspect of the verb, implying that the object is only partially effected, added to the stative nature of the verb, make passivization hardly possible.

*He resembles his father.* Syntactic transitivity (SVO) but NO semantic transitivity. Attribution of a property to the subject. NO Passive correspondent.

*He kicked the bucket (to die).* NO Syntactic transitivity and NO semantic transitivity. Attribution of a property to the subject. NO Passive correspondent ; the meaning would not be preserved.

*Someone has slept in the bed.* NO syntactic transitivity (SVO) but semantic transitivity. The bed is affected. Passive correspondent (*bed* is affected by *sleep*).

**The object (of the active) must be affected in some way in order to become the subject of the passive** (as a consequence of the transfer). **There must be some kind of possible effect** (meaning result) **and/or a close relationship between the verb and its complement.** The fact that the noun phrase must be affected by the verb (as a possible result of the transfer) as a consequence of its being **effective** in some way is what makes passivization possible with intransitive verbs as well, which, by nature, are not followed by objects. This is the reason why some intransitive verbs in certain contexts permit passivization (*sleep*): their complement is affected by the action denoted by the verb. This also accounts for the fact that certain prepositional phrases can occur in the passive, others cannot. (Note 28)

### 3.1 With transitive verbs (direct or indirect) :

*They arrived at a solution* : Syntactic transitivity AND semantic transitivity (prepositional verb, transfer from *they* to a *solution* (result) through the verb. *Solution* : result of the process *arrive*. *Arrive* followed by a non locative NP is typically effective).

Whereas: *they arrived at their cousins'* : NO syntactic transitivity and NO semantic transitivity (no transfer, no result. *Their cousins* is not affected. Intransitive verb).

*He looked at the girl* : Syntactic transitivity AND semantic transitivity (the preposition is specified by the verb when the verb is prepositional. Close relationship between *look* and *at*, and the preposition introduces a NP (noun phrase) which is complement of the preposition, and the whole PP (prepositional phrase) *at the girl* is the indirect object complement of *look*.)

If we take the following passive sentence :

*So much has already been written about the Beatles*. *So much* (the object of the active) has a resultative value (is a metaphor for 'many books'). This is how it is affected. The action *write* is typically effective since it has produced a result (*so much*).

### 3.2 With intransitive verbs

*He looked under the bed* : NO syntactic transitivity and NO semantic transitivity. The bed is not affected ; nor is it a participant. When it has a locative meaning, the preposition is (normally) less constrained. The cohesion between *look* and *under* (which is normal when the preposition introduces an adverbial phrase) is loose. The sentence does not allow passivization. *Under the bed* is an adjunct.

#### 3.2.1 The noun in the PP (prepositional phrase) is affected.

The most classical example is *Somebody has slept in the bed*. *The bed has been slept in*. *Somebody* is associated with the role of agent and the bed is affected. But *in the bed* is an obligatory adjunct, not an object complement. Yet, there is a transfer from the subject to the adjunct (more particularly to the noun included in the PP) through the verb, even though the verb is intransitive. Consequently, the verb functions as a transitive verb and the relationship between **the verb and the adjunct is close**.

It is close because of the **cognitive presupposition** (Note 29) underlying the predicative relation here: *What do you do in a bed? You sleep in it*. That kind of presupposition reinforces the relationship between the verb and the prepositional phrase, which cannot be deleted:

\* *Somebody has slept*.

Other example : *The island cannot be walked across in an hour*. The adjunct is obligatory and the island is affected. The principle of cognitive presupposition applies here as well: the relationship between *walk* and *the island* is natural.

On the contrary, if we take *\*The road was gone across*, there is no semantic link between *go across* and *the road* and no cognitive presupposition. The passive is impossible.

Other examples including obligatory adjuncts that can become subjects of passive utterances :

*Somebody sat on the chair*. *The chair was sat on*. (the chair is affected.) Cognitive presupposition : *What do you do with a chair? You sit on it*.

*Several famous people have lived in this house*. *This house has been lived in by several famous people*. The house is affected (*it has an aura by virtue of the people who have lived in it*), and the principle of cognitive presupposition applies : *What do you do in a house? You live in it*. There is a close relationship between the verb and the prepositional phrase, which cannot be deleted here.

Other examples of the same type :

*Welcome To Berkeley Castle*. *Berkeley Castle has been lived in by the same family for over 900 years*. *It is where history has been made*. (Note 30)

'*You can tell it isn't Saturday night,*' I said. '*Evening, Miss. Two pints.*' [...]

'*Anybody can tell it isn't Saturday night. Nobody sick.*'

'*Nobody here to be sick,*' Leslie said.

*The peeling, liver-coloured room might never have been drunk in at all*. *Here, commercials told jokes and had Scotches and sodas with happy, dyed, port-and-lemon women; [...] influential nobodies revised the earth. [...] Strangers came and went, but mostly went. [...] Sometimes there were fights; and always there was something doing. [...] But that evening it was the saddest room I had ever known*. (Note 31)

The room is affected. Cognitive presupposition.

Now, here are a few examples where the notion of cognitive presupposition does not apply so well :

*Somebody put varnish on the chair. The chair was put varnish on.* The chair is affected because it changes colour. But the explanation involving the notion of cognitive presupposition is not so relevant here. ??? *What do you do with a chair? You put varnish on it.* The relationship between the verb and *chair* is close anyway because a chair can be varnished. The construction of the verb *put* requires two obligatory complements, *to put something somewhere* (*varnish* = direct object complement, *on the chair* : obligatory adjunct). (Note 32) But the explanation cannot lie on syntactic reasons only. If we consider another example of the same type, *I put my wallet in your bag* the passivized sentence *\*your bag was put my wallet in* is impossible (even though the structure is the same as in *somebody put varnish on the chair, V NP PP*) whereas *My wallet was put in your bag* is perfectly acceptable. We may hypothesize that what makes passivization possible with *the chair* as subject of the passive is that the chair is clearly affected. And in *I put my wallet in your bag*, it is not the bag which is affected but my wallet. Passivization depends here on the noun that is affected. Normally it should be the noun within the direct object complement (*varnish*) but sometimes, if that noun cannot be affected in the context, it is the noun from the adverbial prepositional phrase which becomes the subject of the passive.

The same could be said about :

1 *They stuck pins in his body.* (Note 33)

2 *Pins were stuck in his body.*

*Stick pins somewhere* requires two obligatory complements (object and adjunct). This sentence can normally give rise to one passive only : the object (*pins*), which is affected, becomes the subject of the passive : *pins were stuck in his body*. But if 'he' (or 'his body') is taken to be the theme of the utterance and is affected within a given context, it can become the subject of the passive :

*He has been burned, stuck pins in, beheaded, all in effigy, of course.*

Here again it is the second complement (obligatory adjunct) which becomes the subject of the passive, even if there is no real cognitive presupposition. This is only possible within a given context.

*Somebody sat on the hat. The hat was sat on.* The hat is affected but there is no cognitive presupposition here either. We may hypothesize that the relationship between the verb *sit* and the noun *hat* is close because to *sit* necessarily implies to *sit somewhere*.

*They had not marked 'poison' on the bottle. However, the bottle had NOT been marked 'poison', so Alice ventured to taste it, and finding it very nice, (it had, in fact, a sort of mixed flavour of cherry- tart, custard, pine-apple, roast turkey, toffee, and hot buttered toast), she very soon finished it off.* (Note 34) Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

The bottle is affected. No real cognitive presupposition.

3.2.2 The noun in the PP (prepositional phrase) is not affected :

Naturally enough, *My best friend has lived in New York* cannot be passivized (*\*New York has been lived in by my best friend : my best friend / live in New York* does not affect the city). It is indeed more difficult for a larger entity to be affected. But *\*New York has been lived in by Barak Obama* should be possible (the city should be affected), yet it is not. One possible explanation is that there is no cognitive presupposition here and New York is too large an entity to be affected :?? *What do you do in New York? You live in it.* But *New York has been lived in by the most famous people on earth* is possible. The explanation is to be sought elsewhere than in cognitive presupposition in this case. New York can only be affected if the subject of the active refers to a larger group (more likely to affect a whole city).

Anna Siewierska's hypothesis (1984) (Note 35) is that certain sentences containing intransitive verbs like *sleep* and *live* can be passivized if the agent by-phrase is heavily rhematic :

1 *A good portion of the animal kingdom sleep through the winter.*

2 *The winter is slept through by a good portion of the animal kingdom.*

3 *\*The winter is slept through by the bear.*

According to the author, the passive becomes acceptable, even with an intransitive verb, when the agent by-phrase is **sufficiently rhematic**. *By a good portion of the animal kingdom* is more rhematic than *by the bear*. If the NP is insufficiently rhematic, the sentence is not grammatically correct : *\*The winter is slept through by the bear*. It may also be hypothesized that the passive is possible because « the winter » can be said to have a resultative value (= very few animals can be seen) and as a matter of fact, and is likely to be affected in some way.

*The winter* cannot be affected by the fact that only bears sleep through it. This also applies to *\*New York has been lived in by my best friend*: the sentence becomes correct if the agent by-phrase is heavily rhematic : *New York has been lived in by the most famous people on earth*. The agent by-phrase has to be heavily rhematic for the city to be affected.

**Conclusion** : with intransitive verbs, especially when there is no cognitive presupposition, the passive is possible if the NP included in the adjunct of the active is affected in some way, and if the subject (which becomes the agent by-phrase) conveys a lot of information.

This also affects transitive verbs : the agent by-phrase, when present, is always rhematic, and is sometimes obligatory for the sentence to be grammatically correct, otherwise the sentence does not convey enough information :

1. *I cannot tell what sentiment haunted the quite solitary churchyard, with its inscribed headstone; its gate, its two trees, its low horizon, girdled by a broken wall, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide.* (Note 36)

\* *girdled, and its newly-risen crescent, attesting the hour of eventide.*

2. *These open areas of Australia are mainly populated by farmers.*

\* *These open areas of Australia are mainly populated.*

3. *This thought was immediately supplanted by another.* (Note 37)

\* *This thought was immediately supplanted.*

4. *I said I didn't like to think that the person who killed Wellington could be living somewhere nearby and I might meet him when I went out for a walk at night. And this was possible because a murder was usually committed by a person who was known to the victim.* (Note 38)

\* *this was possible because a murder was usually committed.*

**With stative verbs now**, the subject not being agentive, the idea of a semantic transfer from the subject to the object through the verb poses a problem. If the object is to be affected, the verb cannot be totally stative :

*The jar holds oil.* (= is full of)

\**Oil is held by the jar.*

*The thief was held by the police*

*I was held by the Russians in Auschwitz; this is what I saw ...* (Note 39)

*The king possessed great wealth.* (= had great wealth)

\**Great wealth was possessed by the King.*

*The city was soon possessed by the enemy.*

*He afterwards tried several times to repeat the experience. "I was Possessed By God" is the documentary record of one such experience.* (Note 40)

Even if the agent by-phrase is heavily rhematic and the subject discourse-old, the passive remains impossible with purely stative verbs :

\**The oil coming from Italy that you gave us last year is held by the jar in front of you.*

\**The cottage was had by two families.*

*Own* could be passivized because it presupposes the act of buying (and is stative to a lesser degree). The sentence is more acceptable when the agent by-phrase conveys a lot of information:

*The cottage was owned by two families.*

? *The cottage was owned by John.*

*A BUGATTI supercar stopped by cops after an alleged 130mph motorway race with a Ferrari **is owned by** a speed-loving earl.* (Note 41)

The same could be said about the verb *justify* for instance, which describes a state but is not as stative as *have*, *hold* and *possess* :

*She received him with her very best politeness, which he returned with as much more, apologising for his intrusion, without any previous acquaintance with her, which he could not help flattering himself, however, **might be justified by his relationship to the young ladies** who introduced him to her notice.*

The agent is not animate but there is some of transfer from the subject (*his relationship to the young ladies*) to the object (*his intrusion*) which permits passivization.

The following examples can be accounted for in the same way :

*I am not sleepy, or more accurately, my sleepiness **is masked by a state of tension and anxiety** of which I have not yet managed to rid myself, and so I talk and talk.* (Note 42)

*These open areas of Australia are mainly populated by farmers.*

*When he began the novel he already knew what the last words would be, not only the last words of the novel but the last words **thought by Dutch Shea** before he shoots himself. (Note 43)*

Think is not completely stative here.

The passive should thus be impossible with purely stative verbs which presuppose that the subject is not agentive, that the object is not affected because there is no transfer.

**But the passive is nevertheless acceptable** with some stative verbs, especially with **verbs of perception and verbs of feeling** :

*Everyone saw the accident. The accident was seen by everyone.*

*The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still gazed at, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew. The face itself **had been seen only once by three people for a few seconds.** (Note 44)*

Huddleston and Pullum's hypothesis (2002, p. 241) (Note 45) is that with stative verbs, the syntactic dimension of transitivity prevails : « Seeing and disliking are not actions, but the syntactic relation between the members of these pairs is the same as that between *the police arrested her son* and *her son was arrested by the police*, so they can be classified as active and passive pairs. These sentences can be assigned to the active and passive categories on the basis of their syntactic likeness to clauses like those in *the police arrested her son* and *her son was arrested by the police*. »

Our hypothesis is that the transfer is not of the same type as in the previous examples. Here, the subject is not agentive in the same way as it was with dynamic verbs and the object is not affected in the same way either. But the subject has some sort of **responsibility** (Note 46) in the process even if it is not properly speaking agentive. The idea of transfer is here linked to the notion of **responsibility of the subject** and this responsibility permits passivization: the accident is affected by the fact of being seen. The object is completed by the fact of being seen.

*His colleagues dislike him. He **is disliked** by his colleagues.*

*An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow, it was her gift. Nothing else had she of the slightest importance; could not think, write, even play the piano. She muddled Armenians and Turks; loved success; hated discomfort; **must be liked**; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know. (Note 47)*

*You're **very well liked** in Gilly, Father. (Note 48)*

*Is it possible **to be liked** by everyone ?*

The subject is responsible for seeing and for liking or disliking. This is what makes passivization possible. The notion of responsibility allows some kind of transfer and agentivity, and **should be added to the different facets or components of transitivity**.

In the following example, the nature of the verb *watch* (which is a voluntary perception verb) combined with the adverb « closely » enhance the responsibility of the subject :

*Elizabeth soon saw that **she was herself closely watched** by Miss Bingley. (Note 49)*

This also applies to :

*The motor car with its blinds drawn and an air of inscrutable reserve proceeded towards Piccadilly, still **gazed at**, still ruffling the faces on both sides of the street with the same dark breath of veneration whether for Queen, Prince, or Prime Minister nobody knew*

The same could be said about *the pilot sustained many injuries / Many injuries were sustained by the pilot*, in which the subject cannot be responsible for sustaining injuries but in which there is some agency of the subject because some sort of action is involved, the resistance to pain.

But *John cares for you* still resists passivization. Whereas *like* implies some sort of transfer which affects the object, *care for* is completely stative.

#### 4. Conclusion

Passivization is based on the semantic definition of transitivity. If one does not distinguish syntax from semantics, there is no way of understanding why certain transitive verbs cannot be passivized ; no way of understanding either why some intransitive verbs followed by adjuncts can be passivized. The notion of transfer mainly affects dynamic verbs and agentive subjects, but the subject can be low in agency. In fact it is enough for the subject to have a small share of responsibility in the process for the object to be affected in some way and for passivization to be allowed. The object

can be more or less affected, and the verb more or less dynamic but never purely stative. The notion of transitivity emerges as **a property of the whole clause**, and functions as a semantic *continuum*, which makes it necessary to take into consideration various parameters : the subject (agentive or not), the verb (dynamic or not, showing responsibility of the subject or not), the object of the active (which should be affected in order to be thematized, i.e. become the subject of the passive utterance). All such parameters account for the possibility or impossibility of passivization.

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### Notes

Note 1. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. 1985. London : Pearson Longman, pp. 159-171.

Note 2. Rodney Huddleston & Geoffrey Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, p. 1431.

Note 3. Joan Didion. 2005. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. New York: Vintage.

Note 4. Patrick Le Goffic's distinction between *direct object complement* and *direct complement of the verb* is very useful here: « la notion de complément direct ne se confond pas avec celle d'objet direct : si dans l'exemple ci-dessus [Paul rencontre Marie], Marie représente bien un « objet » (c'est-à-dire un actant clairement individualisé, affecté par le procès verbal), en revanche dans *La table mesure un mètre vingt, Ce vin sent le bouchon, Paul doit partir*, le verbe a un complément direct qui ne saurait être qualifié d'objet. *Grammaire de la phrase française*. 1994. Paris : Hachette supérieur, p. 233.

Note 5. As Pierre Cotte says, « Qu'il désigne une action ou non, un verbe passivable signifie qu'un participant en détermine un autre. [...] Dans les énoncés non passivables, une telle détermination fait défaut. *Jane resembles her mother* ne signifie pas que la mère détermine quoi que ce soit chez la fille, ou l'inverse, mais qu'un tiers trouve qu'elle lui ressemble, sans que l'une ou l'autre en ait forcément conscience. [...] Les procès non passivables ne sont pas transitifs mais qualificatifs : ils caractérisent le sujet. L'objet y construit avec le verbe une unité sémantique (*resemble her mother / lack confidence / cost ten pounds / hold 5000 people / fit someone*). Son référent ne valant pas en lui-même mais pour la qualification, il n'est pas envisageable de le thématiser et il n'y a pas de passif. » *L'Explication grammaticale de textes anglais*. 1996. Paris : PUF, p. 78.

Note 6. *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, p. 247.

Note 7. Rodney Huddleston & Geoffrey Pullum. 2006. *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, p. 307.

Note 8. Term borrowed from Paul Hopper & Sandra Thompson. 1980. Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse. *Language* 56(2), p. 251.

Note 9. In extraposed clauses like *it is said that John is getting married in June*, it can be said to be contextually referential in so far as it points to the *that*-clause it replaces.

Note 10. Example borrowed from Bernard De Giorgi. 1997. *Le passif en anglais contemporain*. Thèse de doctorat nouveau régime. Université de Provence.

Note 11. Example borrowed from André Joly & Dairine O'Kelly. 1990. *Grammaire systématique de l'anglais*. Paris : Nathan, p. 151.

Note 12. « The underlined NP in the active is an object not of a verb but of a preposition. The preposition, transitive in the active, is intransitive in the passive, hence the term prepositional passive. The preposition is 'stranded'. The construction is often avoided in formal prose. » Rodney Huddleston & Geoffrey Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, p.1440.

Note 13. 1981. *Grammaire anglaise*. Paris : Nathan.

Note 14. 1990. *Syntax: A Functional-Typological Introduction*, vol. II. Amsterdam : John Benjamins Publishing Co.

Note 15. The passive is not possible for many idioms constituted of a verb and a noun because they form a close unit, a single lexical item. The idiom can be regarded as intransitive :

*The ship set sail. (\*Sail was set.)*

*We changed buses. (\*Buses were changed.)*

*Change colour.*

*Lose courage, lose patience.*

*Keep guard.*

Note 16. Examples borrowed from Jesse Tseng, English Prepositional passives in HPSG. 2007. *Proceedings of the HPSG07 Conference*. Stanford Department of Linguistics and CSLI's LinGO Lab. Stefan Muller (Editor). CSLI Publications (*Center for the Study of Language of Information*). Chicago : The University of Chicago Press.

Note 17. The term « transitive » derives from the Latin *trans*, « across » and *ire*, « go ».

Note 18. « Transitivity is traditionally understood as a global property of an entire clause, such that an activity is 'carried-over' or 'transferred' from an agent to a patient. » Paul Hopper & Sandra Thompson. Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse, p. 251.

Note 19. 1994. *L'Actance*. Paris : PUF, p. 248.

Note 20. Example borrowed from Bernard De Giorgi, *Le passif en anglais contemporain*.

Note 21. [bjaesthetics.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/19/2/181.pdf](http://bjaesthetics.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/19/2/181.pdf)–

Note 22. There are two categories of prepositional expressions : those that only have one passive, and those that can have two passives, one taking the first complement as sujet, the other taking the noun in the PP as subject.

### **I. one passive only :**

#### **a. catch hold of, draw attention to, get the better of, find fault with, make a fool of, make fun of, lose sight of**

*They made a fool of him —> he was made a fool of.*

*He was made a fool of (by them). He was got the better of. The facts were drawn attention to.*

#### **b. take umbrage at, make mention of, call attention to**

*They took umbrage at my remark. —> Umbrage was taken at my remark.*

*Umbrage was taken at my remark (by them). \*my remark was taken umbrage at.*

*He made mention of his unlawful activities. Mention of his unlawful activities was made.*

It is less usual to find Ø in front of the noun while the subject should have a thematic value. These sentences are more natural when a marker is used before the noun :

*To Preserve Our Trees, Ø Attention Is Called to Destruction in Central Park. (select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10E16F83558137B93CBA8178DD85F4D8585F9 -)*

*My attention was called to these two inscriptions in reading a chapter of Professor L. R.. Taylor's book. (soon to be published) on Local Cults in Etruria. (www.jstor.org/stable/295890 -)*

*Ø Mention is made of the whole tradition in aesthetics grounded in Kant and Hegel, with which her own theory has many parallels. ... (ml.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/LV/3/362.pdf?ck=nck)*

*No mention is made of the fact that Mahler wrote half the texts himself, let alone a collation of which texts are by Klopstock and which by Malher. (ml.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/LV/3/362.pdf?ck=nck)*

*No* adds a certain degree of determination to the noun. That kind of passive is much more natural.

### **II. two passives :**

#### **make use of, take advantage of, take care of**

*Make use of, take advantage of, take care of* give rise to two passives but one is preferable :

*They hardly ever made use of this possibility.*

*This possibility was hardly ever made use of.*

*? Use was hardly ever made of this possibility.*

*No use was hardly ever made of this possibility.*

In certain cases, this structure works better when the subject is more determined :

*Can more efficient use be made of x ray examinations in the accident and emergency department? (www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1246007 -)*

*They took advantage of him. He was taken advantage of. ? Ø Advantage was taken of him.*

*Unfair advantage was taken of him.*

*A political heeler rewarded. How Ø advantage was taken of gov. Cleveland's absence from Albany. (New York Times. Saturday, June 21, 2008.)*

*However, "excusable homicide is where death results from a lawful act by lawful means, accomplished accidentally or by misfortune or misadventure, or accomplished with sufficient provocation, with no undue advantage and without unnecessary cruel treatment." (www.oscn.net/applications/oscn/DeliverDocument.asp?CiteID=81428)*

When the locutor may choose between two structures, the most important element is placed at the end. Discourse cohesion is also to be taken into account :

*Why is good care not taken of dogs that are shipped internationally ? (answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090526233708AAqVGD -)*

*How long do hermit crabs live if taken good care of? (wiki.answers.com/Q/How\_long\_do\_hermit\_crabs\_live\_if\_taken\_good\_care\_of -)*

Note 23. See Bernard De Giorgi, *Le passif en anglais contemporain*.

Note 24. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*. (1847) 1986. London : Marshall Cavendish, p. 1.

Note 25. But the verb *receive* for example, used in another sense, is possible in the passive. Then the subject is partly agentive : *THE ladies of Longbourn soon waited on those of Netherfield. The visit was returned in due form. Miss Bennet's pleasing manners grew on the good will of Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley; and though the mother was found to be intolerable and the younger sisters not worth speaking to, a wish of being better acquainted with them was expressed towards the two eldest. By Jane this attention was received with the greatest pleasure; but Elizabeth still saw superciliousness in their treatment of every body, hardly excepting even her sister, and could not like them.* Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*. (1813) 1986. London : Marshall Cavendish, p. 20.

Note 26. 1997. Transitivity et types de procès. *Cahiers de Charles V* 23.

Note 27. Paul Hopper & Sandra Thompson. Transitivity in Grammar and Discourse, p. 252.

Note 28. Dwight Bolinger hypothesizes that « the subject in the passive construction is conceived to be a true patient, i.e. to be genuinely affected by the action of the verb. If the grammatical object in the active construction is not conceived as a true patient (is not affected), there will be no corresponding passive. The verbs may be simple or complex, and among the latter are of course prepositional verbs. » 1977. Transitivity and spatiality : the passive of prepositional verbs. In Adam Makkai, Valerie Makkai & L. Heineman (eds). *Linguistics at the Crossroads*. Lake Bluff, IL : Jupiter Press, 57-78.

*The chair was given to John. (The chair is affected, changes hands.)*

*John was given the chair. (John is affected, now he owns it.)*

*The chair was sat on. (The chair is affected.)*

*The chair was put varnish on. (The chair is affected because it changes colour. )*

Note 29. This expression is borrowed from Bernard De Giorgi's study on the passive, *Le passif en anglais contemporain*.

Note 30. <http://www.berkeley-castle.com/>

Note 31. Dylan Thomas. (1951) 1994. *The Followers*. London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Note 32. Some linguists would regard it as a complement of the direct object complement ('attribut de l'objet').

Note 33. Dwight Bolinger. Transitivity and spatiality : the passive of prepositional verbs, 57-78.

Note 34. Lewis Carroll. (1865) 1987. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. London : Marshall Cavendish, p. 7.

Note 35. 1984. *The Passive: A Comparative Linguistic Analysis*. London: Croom Helm.

Note 36. *Jane Eyre*, p. 1.

Note 37. *The year of Magical Thinking*, p. 39.

Note 38. Mark Haddon. 2003. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*. London : Jonathan Cape, p. 67.

Note 39. [www.fourwinds10.com/siterun\\_data/history/middle\\_east/news.php?q=1210295996-23k-](http://www.fourwinds10.com/siterun_data/history/middle_east/news.php?q=1210295996-23k-)

Note 40. [www.cavehahedi.com/films\\_god.html](http://www.cavehahedi.com/films_god.html)

Note 41. <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/article1242784.ece>

Note 42. Primo Levi. (1979) 2006. *If This is a Man*. London : Abacus, p. 44.

Note 43. Joan Didion. *The Year of Magical Thinking*, p. 52.

Note 44. Virginia Woolf. (1925) 2000. *Mrs Dalloway*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, p. 14.

Note 45. *A Student's Introduction to English Grammar*, p. 241.

Note 46. This idea is discussed at length in Bernard de Giorgi's thesis, *Le passif en anglais contemporain*.

Note 47. *Mrs Dalloway*, p. 103.

Note 48. Colleen Mc Cullough. (1977) 1984. *Thorn Birds*. London & Sydney : Futura, p. 121.

Note 49. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, p. 269.