

Passive and Impersonal in English and Serbian¹

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Abstract

This paper argues that the class of constructions traditionally classified as the ‘reflexive passive’ in Serbian (and some other Slavic languages) are not passive but impersonal — a discrete morphosyntactic class of constructions with a separate set of defining properties, constraints and syntactic reflexes. The analysis shows that once the impersonal diathesis type is identified, the set of the defining properties of the English-type periphrastic passive (which also exists in Serbian and other Slavic languages) narrows down and becomes more coherent. The suggested classification of Serbian constructions distinguishes between two broad diathesis types: passive and impersonal. These in turn can be divided into further subclasses:

^[1] I would like to express my immense gratitude to Jim Blevins for his patience and many helpful comments on this paper.

passive into personal and subjectless type and impersonal into ‘deep’ impersonals on the one hand and two types of ‘surface’ impersonals — intransitive and transitive on the other.

Introduction

Verbal diathesis has been one of the central interests of linguists over centuries. Different ‘defining’ criteria have been postulated in order to distinguish between its different types. Among other types of verbal diathesis, the passive alternation has been one of the most thoroughly studied phenomena and accounting for it has always been one of the most important tests for the explanatory power of any syntactic theory.

There is a large class of ‘passives’ attested crosslinguistically, which are to some extent similar but are nevertheless divergent enough in their properties so as to thwart attempts of arriving at a unified analysis of them and eventually positing certain ‘universal’ properties of passivization.

However, if a consistent morphosyntactic analysis is conducted —excluding the notions of function, meaning, morphotactic properties, etc. as defining of passives and ‘passive-like constructions’ — it turns out that the set of idiosyncratic ‘passive’ constructions actually comprises two discrete sets of

constructions — **passives** and **impersonals** — each of which is morphosyntactically different and has a different set of constraints (although they may have similar sense, functional load and even morphotactic properties in some languages).

One case of imprecise categorization and misapplication of an extended notion of ‘passive’ to a discrete diathesis type which can be termed impersonal has been conducted in a number of Slavic languages where both constructions are attested.

The present paper will concentrate on the description and analysis of the systems of passive and impersonal in Serbian, one of the languages of the South Slavic family. I will show that similar misapplication of the notion of passive has led to the imprecise classification of two distinct diathesis types in Serbian. I will suggest possible reasons for this and offer an alternative classification showing that ‘reflexive passive’ constructions traditionally regarded as a subclass of passive are actually impersonal and should be united with other subclasses of impersonal constructions. The suggested classification distinguishes between two broad diathesis types: passive and impersonal. These in turn can be divided into further subclasses: passive into personal and subjectless type, and impersonal into ‘deep’ impersonals on the one hand and two types of ‘surface’ impersonals — intransitive and

transitive on the other.

The introductory part of the paper gives an overview of the traditional and more recent approaches to the problem of the passive alternation and its defining properties and introduces certain notions and generalizations, which will be the basis for the discussion in the paper. I then proceed to describe the system of passive in English and suggest that some of the mentioned notions could help illuminate certain inconsistencies within the system of this prototypically 'passive' language. A literally contrastive description of the Serbian system of passive and impersonal follows, since general and voice systems of the two languages differ to a great extent. However, I also point out certain similarities between them. The paper concludes with an overview of the similarities and differences between the English and Serbian constructions discussed and states certain implications that the analysis offered in the paper has for the crosslinguistic status of the constructions.

'Basic passive'

As stated by Keenan (1985: 247) in one of his generalizations about passive constructions across languages, if a language has any passives, it has a type of basic passive generally characterized by several common features:

- basic syntactic functions within an active clause are changed, the active direct object becoming passive subject while active subject corresponds to an optional oblique in the passive;
- if overt, the oblique is expressed in the form of an adjunct marked by a preposition or a case inflection;
- in the passive, the active transitive verb displays changed, passive morphology;
- basic passive constructions can be synthetic or periphrastic and the periphrastic ones may use various auxiliary verbs in different languages.

The described pattern of altered relations within a clause is virtually universally accepted by linguists as being defining of at least one type of passive — the personal passive. Here, the underlying thematic roles Agent and Patient are realigned and assigned different syntactic functions, without changing their semantic content. The passive subject acquires properties of the syntactic subject, it is assigned nominative case and triggers verbal agreement. Such pairs of active and passive clauses are usually regarded as juxtaposed constructions with more or less the same propositional content, the passive one being marked and active unmarked (Comrie 1988: 19). As pointed out by Klaiman (1991) among others, Agent and Patient thematic

roles are the typical ones which may be borne by core arguments and participate in passivization. However, other roles like Beneficiary, Instrument, Location, etc. can also, though less typically, participate.

If we only knew about the prototypical personal passive of a prototypically 'passive' language, such as English for instance, the given characterization would almost seem to be the definitive one. However, cross-linguistic research has pointed out the fact that passives in different languages diverge significantly from the given pattern. In the presence of such facts, the traditional notion of passive had to be reanalysed.

Towards a unified characterization of passivization

*Subjectless passive*²

While most of the different approaches to passivization recognize that it is a morphological detransitivizing process that instigates passive alternations, there is little consent about its syntactic reflexes.

Subjectless passives have been attested in a number of languages such as

^[2] The usual term used for this type of passive is 'impersonal passive'. However, I am using the term 'subjectless' to avoid confusion and to emphasize the distinction between this construction and impersonal.

Latin, German, Dutch, Turkish, etc. Recognition of the existence of this type of construction was an incentive for a large-scale debate and consequent changes of the traditional view of the passive.

What facilitates the existence of subjectless passives in the mentioned languages, as argued by Babby (1989: 8) in connection with certain Ukrainian and Russian constructions,³ is optionality of the subject NP position in their sentences. Therefore, it is possible for these languages to form constructions that lack a specified subject and consequently verbal agreement. They retain passive verbal morphology though, and the optional oblique adjunct phrase.

On the other hand, because of the obligatory subject NP in its sentences, English does not allow subjectless passives. As Babby (*ibid.*) points out, ‘the obligatoriness of direct object movement in English passive sentences is directly dependent on the obligatoriness of the subject NP position in English sentences.’

Focus on precisely such language-specific traits, however, has been the basis of some rather narrow views of passivization operations, which have been criticized by others taking a broader view of the matter.

^[3] Though some of the constructions he mentions are indeed subjectless but not passive but impersonal.

Promotion vs. demotion

Disregarding the fact that there are optional-subject languages with no subject dummies as in English, linguists like Perlmutter (1978) and Perlmutter & Postal (1983), proponents of Relational Grammar, argue that all passives including subjectless passives can be accounted for in terms of the promotional analysis. They describe passivization as a change in grammatical relations postulating a syntactically represented multi-stratal relational network consisting of 1s, 2s and 3s, grammatical relations which represent core arguments or terms of a predicate and correspond to traditional notions of subject, direct object and indirect object. In their view, the ultimate demotion or deletion of active subject in passivization operation is a result of **object promotion**, which is regarded as primary.

On the other hand, a substantial number of approaches favour an alternative, demotional analysis of passivization. Appreciating the fact that there are optional-subject languages and consequently subjectless constructions in them, linguists such as Comrie (1977), Keenan (1985), Siewierska (1984), Blevins (2003), etc., claim that the RG promotional approach cannot readily account for this. They treat passivization as essentially a subject-sensitive operation whose primary effect is as Comrie (*ibid.*) terms it 'spontaneous' **demotion of the subject** and consequent promotion of the object in

personal passives. Obviously, such an account of passivization alternations is more universally applicable, while at the same time also accounting for languages such as English where on the face of it the choice between the two accounts has no significant consequences. This view will be accepted as the superior one in the present paper as well.

The Unaccusative Hypothesis

Postulating ‘initial’ and ‘final’ relational strata, i.e. initial and final argument structure of a predicate, Perlmutter (1978) made a distinction between initially unaccusative and initially unergative intransitive verbs. Initially unergative verbs specify a subject argument in their underlying argument structure, whereas initially unaccusative verbs specify an object. As Perlmutter (*ibid.*: 161) suggests, ‘this is predictable from the semantics of the clause’. These semantic properties are reflected onto syntax thus characterizing the unaccusativity phenomenon as a point of convergence of semantic and syntactic properties (Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995: 2).

The languages that possess subjectless passives exhibit a characteristic behaviour with respect to the argument structure of the verb that serves as the input to passivization. Namely, they allow passivization of unergative intransitive verbs, while disallowing passivization of unaccusatives.

Given the demotional view of passivization, the central prediction based on the Unaccusative Hypothesis is that the unaccusative verbs will not passivize. This prediction is largely cross-linguistically confirmed. The resistance of initially unaccusative verbs to passivization follows from the fact that subject demotion naturally cannot apply to the nonexistent logical subjects of the unaccusative verbs. On the other hand, intransitive unergative verbs naturally undergo passivization given that they specify initial subjects, which can be demoted.

As suggested by Blevins (2003), the distinction between unergative and unaccusative predicates could be applied to transitive verbs as well, and used as a possible explanation for certain constraints on passivization observed in English.

Overall, the recognition of the fact that passivization is a subject-sensitive process that alters the argument structure of the input verb by deleting its subject (external) argument is the key insight of the long-lasting debate, and the beginning of the answer to the question of what the defining properties of passives are.

Impersonal constructions

Different sorts of impersonal constructions are widely attested in many languages, notably Slavic, Romance and Balto-Finnic. They can generally be divided into intransitive and transitive — depending on the argument structure of the input verb. While the intransitive impersonals have been at least descriptively correctly classified as such (cf. Siewierska (1984), Stanojcic & Popovic (1992), Stevanovic (1986), Baric et al. (1995)), the status of the transitive impersonals is far from clear.

A general tendency is to classify the transitive impersonals as passives (personal or impersonal, depending on the case of the syntactic subject, or, better, object) — with admittedly several ‘peculiar’ characteristics that do not characterize the prototypical passive (cf. Siewierska (1984), Babby (1989), Sobin (1985 quoted in Babby 1989) Franks (1995), Avgustinova et al. (1999), etc.). These characteristics (I elaborate on them in more detail in the sections on intransitive and transitive impersonals) then have to be accounted for by positing certain additional constraints on passivization and proliferating the number of its ‘defining’ properties. This kind of classification stems from treating their apparently ‘passive-like’ properties in the domain of sense, function and morphotactics as definitional and disregarding their discrete morphosyntactic properties.

However, a closer look at the morphosyntactic properties of impersonals (transitive and intransitive) as opposed to passives suggests that they are two discrete types of constructions and that the properties which seem strange and unexpected in the context of passives are completely expected in that of impersonals.

As pointed out by Blevins (2003), impersonalization, as opposed to passivization, is essentially a valence-preserving operation, which inhibits (suppresses) the syntactic realization of the surface subject but retains it as unexpressed, without changing the argument structure of the personal verb. As opposed to passivization, the suppressed subject in an impersonal construction generally cannot resurface in the shape of an oblique. Since impersonalization yields subjectless output, the impersonal forms of transitive verbs retain grammatical objects.

As it does not operate on the level of underlying argument structure of a verb, impersonalization is insensitive to it, which is compatible with the fact that initially unaccusative predicates can undergo impersonalization. On the other hand, as with other subjectless constructions, the output of impersonalization is only felicitous if it is applied to verbs whose subject can be construed as human — these constructions are always interpreted as having an indefinite, generic human agent. Passivization is generally not

constrained in this way. In addition, impersonalised verb forms do not display passive morphology as those in personal and subjectless passives but display a different kind of systematic marking.

Therefore, the basic (and defining) contrast between passive and impersonal constructions is that the predicates of the former undergo a valence-changing operation which reduces the number of arguments in the argument structure of the predicate by deleting its logical subject, while the predicates of the latter undergo a valence-preserving operation, which preserves transitivity and only inhibits the realization of a surface subject (cf. Blevins 2003).

All these properties will be shown to apply to Serbian impersonal constructions as well, and will be used to reanalyse those that are misanalysed in traditional grammars.

The system of passive in English

As I already mentioned, the English passive construction can be regarded as the prototypical one and it corresponds perfectly to the set of features which Keenan (1985: 47) subsumes under the notion of 'basic passive'. English could be said to be unusual, at least among Indo-European

languages, more specifically among West Germanic, in so strictly conforming to these characteristics. However, since syntactic subject is obligatory in English sentences, it is only to be expected that its passive system cannot allow such variations like subjectless passive constructions. It goes without saying that it also does not allow impersonal constructions.

Form and function

As proposed by Bresnan (1982), the passive lexical rule changes a transitive lexical form to a grammatically intransitive one operating on the underlying predicate argument structure and demoting the initial subject with concomitant promotion of the underlying object. Such changed grammatical relations are reflected on the syntactic level in that as Huddleston & Pullum (2001: 1427) state ‘we find large-scale structural differences between an active clause and its passive counterpart.’

These differences are reflected in the changed verb morphology, a passive verb phrase containing a personal inflected form of the auxiliary verb BE and the PASSIVE PARTICIPLE of the main verb, thus forming a periphrastic construction. The subject of the active clause is demoted to a more often than not optional oblique expressed as the complement of the preposition BY in an adjunct phrase. The object of the active clause appears

as the subject of the passive clause. It is assigned nominative case and triggers verbal agreement. The thematic roles remain unchanged. This pattern is illustrated in the following example:

- (1) a. James Joyce wrote Ulysses.
 b. Ulysses was written by James Joyce.

As Saeed (1997: 155–6) points out, the active-passive alternation affords speakers with certain flexibility in viewing thematic roles, so that a given situation can be described from the point of view of the patient rather than that of the agent. In other words, patient role is foregrounded while the agent role can be more or less backgrounded.

Long and short passives

The level of agent backgrounding directly depends on the presence or absence of, as Huddleston & Pullum (*ibid.*: 428) term it, an internalised complement in the shape of the BY prepositional phrase. Long passives are those that contain this complement, while short passives do not.

In few cases internalised complements are not omissible, notably when they contain the verbs *precede* or *follow* used in a temporal sense, like in (2):

(2) His remark was followed by a long silence.

In the cases when this complement is used the information of the corresponding active is preserved, only the viewpoint is changed. A major constraint on the use of the internalised complement is that the passive subject must not be less familiar in the discourse than the internalised NP (*ibid.*: 1444).

(3) a. The mayor's term of office expires next month. *She* will be succeeded *by George Hendricks*.

b. George Hendricks will take office next month. **The current mayor, Angela Cooke*, will be succeeded *by him*. (*ibid.*: 1444)

The preponderant short passive differs from the long passive in that information expressed in the active clause is for some reason omitted and the agent so far backgrounded that it becomes merely an implied participant (Saeed 1997: 156). There are various reasons for this omission. Namely, the agent may be unknown, redundant, the cause of a certain event may be too general to name, or there may exist a wish to avoid implying too direct or personal involvement. Short passives are also characteristic of scientific register.

Get-passives

As already mentioned basic periphrastic passives often employ more than one auxiliary verb. One of them is usually more commonly used and unmarked, whereas the other is usually stylistically and semantically marked in one way or another.

Apart from the unmarked construction with the auxiliary BE English has periphrastic passives with the auxiliary GET⁴.

There are several differences between these two types of constructions:

The GET-passive is generally avoided in formal style and is much less frequent in colloquial style as well. It is only found with dynamic verbs and the use in (4) is ungrammatical:

- (4) Obviously, the manager is/*gets feared by most of his staff.
(Huddleston & Pullum 2001: 1442)

Therefore, the usual ambiguity between dynamic and stative reading of BE-passives, which will be discussed in the following section, normally does

^[4]As Quirk et al. (1985: 160) note, however, by most syntactic criteria GET is not an auxiliary at all.

not arise with GET-passives. Furthermore, the substitution of BE with GET often leads to disambiguation, allowing only the dynamic reading.

- (5) a. The mirror was broken. (ambiguous)
 b. The mirror got broken. (verbal and dynamic)

GET-passive is usually used in short passives, without an expressed agent phrase, though occurrences with it are also possible. As Quirk et al. (*ibid.*: 161) suggest, the tendency of avoiding the agent phrase might be accounted for by the fact that GET normally places special emphasis on the subject-referent's condition in a situation.

- (6) He got sacked.

As Huddleston & Pullum (*ibid.*: 1442) point out, the GET-passive tends to be preferred to the BE-passive when the subject-referent can be construed as having an agentive role in or some responsibility for the situation.

As they further state, GET is predominantly used in passives which imply that a situation has either an adverse or beneficial effect on the subject-referent. For purely neutral situations BE is preferred:

(7) a. My necklace got stolen

vs.

b. The bread was/*got bought yesterday.

Verbal and adjectival passives

The potential for ambiguity between a dynamic and a stative (or resultative) reading of ‘passive’ constructions is much more pronounced with constructions taking the BE auxiliary than with those taking GET. Passive constructions are therefore often regarded as a fuzzy category (Biber et al. 1999) and represented on a gradient scale⁵ (Quirk et al. 1985). However, this can be regarded as an example of imprecise classification. Thus ‘passive gradient’ can be divided into two discrete sets of constructions containing two categorially distinct ‘parts of speech’ — on the one hand, periphrastic passives with passive participles, which are obviously verbs, and on the other, copular constructions with participial (deverbal) adjectives derived by conversion from passive participles (Bresnan 1982; 2001).

So in keeping with prototypical semantic properties of verbs and adjectives,

^[5] The distinction is made between ‘central passives’, ‘semi-passives’ and ‘pseudo-passives’ (*ibid.*: 167–70)

the periphrastic passives, containing verbs, receive dynamic reading while copular constructions receive stative (resultative) reading.

The ambiguous cases like:

(8) Her heart was broken.

can be disambiguated by applying a number of grammatical tests⁶ which help determine the categorial status of the ‘-en word’ and consequently the nature of the given construction.

The distinction between periphrastic passives and copular constructions can often be made quite straightforwardly by selecting either a dynamic (verb) or a stative (adjective) reading. However, as Huddleston and Pullum (2001: 1438) among others note, there are periphrastic passives which can select a stative reading, in which case the difference in meaning between verbal and adjectival constructions is neutralised. This refers to examples like

(9) She is loved/ praised/ admired/respected etc. (by everyone)

As will be shown later, in connection with a similar phenomenon in Serbian,

^[6] See Bresnan (1982, 2001) and Huddleston & Pullum (2001) for an extensive list of grammatical tests for adjectival status.

this neutralisation of meaning is characteristic of a relatively small class of verbs with particular semantic and aspectual properties — namely of imperfective/durative atelic verbs.

Constraints on passivization in English

According to definitions in most pedagogical and theoretical grammars, the prerequisite for passivization in English is the existence of the direct object, i.e. the verb undergoing passivization has to be transitive. Although English for the most part fits this pattern, there are certain inconsistencies, which are generally referred to as, more or less well-explained or completely unexplained, constraints.

Direct objects in the form of subordinate clauses are more or less restricted in use (Quirk et al. 1985) though sometimes it is possible to externalise them.

(10) a. Tim complained that it was too noisy.

b. *That it was too noisy was complained by Tim.

As Quirk et al. (1985) state, passivization is also blocked when there is **coreference between a subject and an NP object**, with reflexive pronouns,

reciprocal pronouns and possessive pronouns coreferential to the subject.

Further restrictions are noticed in connection with **prepositional passives**.

These are generally divided into two groups: those where the preposition is specified by the verb or verbal idiom and those with locative prepositions not specified by the verb.

Regarding the first group, Bresnan (1982) argues that these are single complex lexical verbs, which govern direct objects, and it is therefore possible for them to undergo passivization:

(11) a. The company approved of the plan.

b. The plan was approved of by the company.

However, the abovementioned explanation does not readily account for the second group of verbs, some of which can also passivize. Huddleston & Pullum (2001) and Huddleston (1984) suggest that there are pragmatic constraints which make passives like (12) felicitous and those like (13) not. Namely, they are only felicitous if it is implied that the subject-referent has been significantly affected by the process denoted by the VP.

(12) The hat has been sat on.

(13) *The tree has been sat under.

Another possible explanation (as suggested by Blevins, p.c.) might be that some prepositional phrases are more strongly selected by the verb.

Perhaps the least clearly explained constraints are those regarding **transitive verbs**, which nevertheless resist passivization. This can be seen from the following examples, none of which can passivize:

- (14) The book costs seven pounds.
- (15) The bag weighs twenty kilos.
- (16) That dress fits you perfectly.
- (17) Such attitude does not become you.
- (18) This detail always escapes me.
- (19) This packet contains nuts.
- (20) He has two children.

Enumerating similar examples, Huddleston & Pullum (2001: 1432) comment that since the objects in these clauses cannot be externalised, they cannot be regarded as prototypical objects. They go on to state that in spite of this it cannot be claimed that they are not objects. They also note (*ibid.*: 246) that passivization in general depends on the interaction of pragmatic, semantic, syntactic and lexical factors.

Given this last observation, and accepting demotion as the basic property of the passive, one might suggest that looking at the nature of the syntactic direct object is not a particularly constructive way of handling this problem. Rather, the focus should be on determining the nature of the subject i.e. determining whether the given verb specifies the underlying subject in its argument structure. The absence of the underlying subject, i.e. the unaccusative nature of at least some of the verbs, could be an explanation for the impossibility of passivization. The non-existent underlying subject cannot be demoted.

Passive and impersonal in Serbian

While the passive, although not as extensively used as in English, is relatively well described in Serbian grammars (at least its basic use), the impersonal has a rather equivocal status. One type of impersonal constructions — the intransitive impersonal — has been properly analysed as impersonal. However, another type — the transitive impersonal — has been misanalysed as a type of passive — the ‘reflexive passive’ (as in most other Slavic and Romance languages) chiefly due to the application of solely functional criteria and to the disregard for important formal and semantic differences between the transitive impersonal and the passive. Simultaneously, overwhelming similarities between transitive and

intransitive impersonal have been overlooked. The latter, however, clearly call for a reanalysis of these constructions and suggest classification of the two impersonal types as a discrete diathesis type — impersonal.

The passive

Serbian is another language that conforms to Keenan's (1985) generalisation about the existence of a basic passive in any language that has passives at all. However, Serbian also has a non-basic passive — the subjectless passive.

The personal passive — basic passive

The passive lexical rule operates in much the same way on Serbian verbs and in the case of transitive unergative predicates yields a personal passive similar to its English counterpart.

The passive VP contains the appropriate inflected form of the auxiliary verb BITI (be) and the PASSIVE PARTICIPLE of the main verb forming a periphrastic construction. The rest of the 'large-scale structural differences' caused by changed relations are reflected in the demotion of the active NOMINATIVE subject to the optional oblique. If overt, the oblique is

The passive participle — verb or adjective

The Serbian passive participle is formed from the INFINITIVE STEM of both PERFECTIVE and IMPERFECTIVE verbs adding the inflections - N/-NA/-NO or -T/-TA/-TO for masculine, feminine and neuter gender respectively. As in English, it is a non-finite verb form and it resembles adjectives in that it can inflect for gender and number but not for person.

Adjectival properties of participles in general have been clearly perceived cross-linguistically (cf. Haspelmath 1994 among others) and they are also confirmed by Serbian passive participles. As their English counterparts, apart from featuring in periphrastic passive construction, Serbian passive participles converted into participial adjectives appear as complements of the same auxiliary (BITI - be) in a copular construction. So just like in English, the similarity of the two constructions is a regular source of ambiguity between a dynamic and stative interpretation.

As is to be expected, the tradition of imprecise classification has been followed by Serbian and Croatian grammarians⁷ as well. However, as I will

^[7] Among the grammars consulted, only Stevanovic (1986, vol 1.: 354–7) at least to some extent recognizes the reality and importance of this distinction for establishing the appropriate passive conjugation paradigm. He also lists relevant grammatical tests for

show presently, its consequences in Serbian turn out to be in a way much more serious than in English. Namely, imprecise classification of the two constructions obscures certain irregularities in the passive conjugation paradigm, which, if perceived, account for the extensive use of Serbian transitive impersonals in place of passives and consequently shed some light on the origins of their faulty classification.

Therefore, it is difficult to overstate the already emphasized importance of accurate classification and clear distinction between the verbal passive and the copular adjectival construction.

As already mentioned in connection with the ways of distinguishing between English verbal passives and copular constructions, it is generally possible to make the distinction by interpreting the given construction either dynamically (verbal passive) or statically (copular construction). The same test proves to be quite reliable for a vast majority of Serbian verbs as well.

However, owing to their semantic and aspectual properties, a relatively small class of imperfective atelic verbs like HVALITI (laud), POSTOVATI (respect), CENITI (appreciate), CUVATI (guard), etc. resist this kind of test

adjectival status (*ibid.* vol 2.: 725–34). In the rest of the grammars this distinction is ignored and ambiguous examples are given (Stanojčić & Popović 1992, Barić et al. 1995, Grubišić 1995).

both in English and Serbian (see Milosevic 1974 for a detailed semantic analysis of these verbs and their behaviour within passive construction in Serbian). The difference in meaning between the two constructions that contain them is neutralised and it does not affect the general meaning of the utterance. In Serbian this neutralisation is further reflected in the conjugation paradigm of the above verbs.

The conjugation paradigms — verbal and adjectival

The tense paradigms of the Serbian periphrastic passive and the copular construction do not match as might be expected. This is the reason why it is important to make a clear distinction between the two. The following two tables will make this point clear⁸:

Table 1: Periphrastic passive

PRESENT TENSE	/
PAST TENSE	Vaza je slomljena. – The vase was broken.
PLUPERFECT	Vaza je bila slomljena. – The vase had been broken.

^[8] I point out only these three tenses as particularly relevant for present discussion. Both constructions have forms for all other tenses and moods.

Table 2: Copular construction

PRESENT TENSE	Vaza je slomljena. – The vase is broken.
PAST TENSE	Vaza je bila slomljena. – The vase was broken.
PLUPERFECT	Vaza bejase bila slomljena. ⁹ – The vase had been broken.

As can be seen from table 1, the Serbian periphrastic passive does not have a form for present tense. Regardless of whether a verb is perfective or imperfective, when passivized it can only denote a **past time** activity (see Milosevic 1974 for a discussion of the interplay of verbal aspect and time reference within the periphrastic passive construction in Serbian). So there is virtually an empty slot in the passive paradigm. Since it is communicatively very important, it needs to be filled in some way or other. As will be seen later on, when possible, this slot is filled by the transitive impersonal construction (traditionally called ‘reflexive passive’). Otherwise, the personal active has to be used, with a possible change of word order for emphasis.

On the other hand, table 2 shows that there is no such constraint with the copular construction. In this case, time reference is given by the copula

^[9] The Pluperfect is archaic and hardly ever used in this construction. It has been replaced by Past Tense.

while the participial adjective, like any other adjective, gives a description of a particular state.

The only exceptions to said generalization are the atelic imperfective verbs mentioned in the discussion on the nature of the passive participle. Since the adjectival and verbal component are intertwined in their case, the same happens with their time reference. Therefore, even within the periphrastic passive they can be construed as denoting a present time activity, though still implying a simultaneous presence or evolvment of the state caused by that activity. So their status is far from clear both in English and Serbian. However, given that these verbs are few in comparison with the rest that can only refer to past when passivized, they can hardly serve as the basis for a general observation about the Serbian periphrastic passive and its interaction with tense: periphrastic passive can inflect for all tenses and moods except for the Present Tense.

It should also be noted that Serbian is relatively unique in having only one auxiliary at its disposal for forming passive constructions. What is more, it lacks precisely the kind of auxiliary as would enable the passive construction to denote (present time) activity — like German WERDEN (Durrell 1996: 298), Polish ZOSTAĆ (Siewierska 1988: 250) or to some extent English GET.

Passive on three-place predicates

As Keenan (1985: 277) observes, if a language has a basic passive then it always passivizes three-place predicates (ditransitive verbs) in such a way that a derived subject is the Patient of the active verb. Passives where the Recipient is the subject may or may not exist. While the latter observation exactly describes the English pattern the former applies to Serbian.

In Serbian, the Agent is typically assigned nominative case, the Recipient dative and the Patient accusative. In Serbian, only the accusative DO with the underlying Patient role can be promoted. A number of verbs in Serbian behave in this way, notably DATI (give), POKAZATI (show), DODATI (hand), POKLONITI (give a present), etc. For instance:

(22) a. Marko je dao cvet Sari.

Mark.NOM give.PAST.3SG flower.ACC Sarah.DAT

Mark gave Sarah a flower.

b. Cvet je dat Sari (od strane Marka).

flower.NOM be.AUX.3SG give.PASS.PART Sarah.DAT by Mark

Sarah was given a flower by Mark.

Subjectless passives are also formed when the active syntactic object appears in the form of a **finite or non-finite subordinate clause**.

(24) a. Roditelji su naredili da idemo kuci.
 parents.NOM.PL order.PAST.3PL that we go home
 The parents ordered us to go home.

b. Naredjeno je da idemo kuci (od strane
 roditelja)
 order.PASS.PART.NEUT be.AUX.3SG that we go home (by the
 parents)
 We were ordered to go home (by the parents).

Prepositional passives in Serbian are also subjectless - the ‘prepositional object’ cannot be promoted and there is no agreement on the verb after subject demotion. Various verbs can be passivized in this way, e.g. VEROVATI U (believe in), ZAZIRATI OD (shrink from), DISKUTOVATI O (discuss), ZABORAVITI NA (forget about), etc.

(25) a. Radnici su diskutovali o tome na
 sastanku.
 workers.MASC.PL.NOM discuss.PAST.3PL about that.LOC at the
 meeting

The workers discussed that at the meeting.

b. O tome je diskutovano na sastanku

(od strane radnika).

about that.LOC be.AUX.3SG discuss.PASS.PART.NEUT at the
meeting (by the workers)

That was discussed at the meeting (by the workers).

While the mentioned types of subjectless passives are well established in Serbian, **subjectless passives of intransitive unergative verbs (one-place predicates)** are very rarely used. Passives of verbs such as TRCATI (run), PLIVATI (swim), PUSITI (smoke), PRICATI (speak), PEVATI (sing), IGRATI (dance) and the like can be found occasionally, but given that all of them have obvious human agents, they are normally used in impersonal intransitive constructions.

The impersonal

As in other Slavic languages, the impersonal diathesis type in Serbian is clearly attested though generally not clearly defined and classified in traditional grammar. This broad category can in the first instance be divided into two basic types — ‘deep’ and ‘surface’ impersonal (cf. Blevins 2003).

'Deep' impersonal

This kind of impersonal exists in all Slavic languages. The term 'deep' refers to the fact that, unlike 'surface' impersonals, these verbs are lexically impersonal (subjectless) and do not specify underlying thematic subjects in their argument structure. Consequently, their syntactic realization is impersonal as well, and the verb appears in the default non-agreeing 3SG NEUTER form.

Two characteristic groups of deep impersonals are the so-called (i) 'weather verbs' and (ii) 'dispositional reflexives' (Bauer & Grepl's (1980) term cited in Franks (1995: 364)). The latter have a lexically specified dative argument, traditionally referred to as 'semantic subject' denoting the person experiencing a particular state.

- (i) GRMELO JE (it thundered), SEVALO JE (there was lightning), SVICE (it dawns), PLJUSTI (it's raining cats and dogs), SMRKAVA SE (it's getting darker), DUVA (it's windy), etc
- (ii) GADI MI SE (I feel nauseous), JEDE MI SE (I feel like eating), NE ZIVI MI SE (I don't feel like living), RADI MI SE (I feel like working), etc.

'Surface' impersonals

'Surface' impersonals are syntactically impersonalized originally personal verb-forms whose syntactic subject has been suppressed, without changes in the personal verb's argument structure - there is no concomitant promotion of object. Therefore there are no changes in grammatical relations and the original active verb remains active, only impersonalized.

Impersonalization has different markings in different languages. In Serbian, the impersonalization marker is the REFLEXIVE 'SE' (self) form (hereafter IMPERSONAL MARKER - IMP in glosses)¹⁰ added to a transitive or intransitive personal active verb form.

The intransitive impersonal

The Serbian intransitive impersonal could be said to represent a canonical impersonal construction in that it embodies all the defining impersonal characteristics. It is relatively well described in Serbian grammars as well (Stanojčić & Popović 1992, Stevanović 1986). The

^[10] The reflexive se-form is multifunctional and marks true reflexive verbs, reciprocals, inherent reflexives, middles and impersonals (cf. Siewierska 1988: 257, Kupsc (1999: 111–13). This is often a source of ambiguity, particularly between middle and impersonal 'reading'. (See also Grimshaw's (1982) lexical analysis of a similar form in French and Moskovljević (1997) for a lexical analysis of Serbian 'true reflexive' se-marker)

following examples illustrate the pattern:

- (26) a. Opet je spavao mirno.
 again sleep.PAST.3SG.MASC peacefully
 He slept peacefully again.
- b. Opet se mirno spavalo
 again IMP peacefully sleep.PAST.3SG.NEUT
 One slept peacefully again.

The intransitive impersonal construction is formed by impersonalising the intransitive personal active verb and it is marked by the impersonal marker SE. The active impersonal verb-form has all tenses and moods just like its personal counterpart. Since the sole syntactic argument has been suppressed nothing is left to trigger verbal agreement and the verb appears in the impersonal 3SG NEUTER form. Since the syntactic subject has only been suppressed and not deleted, it cannot be expressed in the form of an agent adjunct phrase. It remains implied in the construction though, (perhaps, as Frajzyngier (1982: 269) suggests ‘overtly indicated by the structure of the whole sentence’) accounting for the indefinite human reference that all impersonals possess.

Virtually all intransitive verbs (including intransitive two-place predicates

and prepositional verbs) - unergative and unaccusative - can be impersonalised in Serbian. The only condition is that they can be construed as having a human agent. The implied human agent can be generic, or a loosely specified collective or individual (27) (Siewierska 1988: 261, Stanojčić & Popović 1992: 244):

(27) U toj kafani se puno pije
 In that tavern IMP a lot drink.PRES.3SG
 People drink a lot in that tavern.

If a verb not normally referring to humans is impersonalised, the output is still construed as referring to humans and is consequently either infelicitous or metaphorical and/or humorous. The action as expressed in (28) would not be attributed to hens or some other birds but to humans (cf. Frajzyngier (1982: 273) for other examples that illustrate the same point):

(28) Kljuca se po dvoristu.
 peck.PRES.3SG IMP in the yard
 *One is pecking in the yard.

To summarize, the most salient features of intransitive impersonal constructions (and, as I will show in the following section, transitive

impersonals) are insensitivity to the predicate's initial argument structure and requirement of human agency. In Serbian they are typically used to express the so-called 'man'-Bedeutung' (Ivic 1963) and, as the above glosses suggest, are best translated into English by the indefinite personal pronoun 'one'.

The transitive impersonal

As shown previously, the Serbian passive paradigm has a communicatively very important empty slot (no Present Tense in the passive), which is often filled by the transitive impersonal construction.

Like its intransitive counterpart, this construction is formed by impersonalising the personal active verb and it is marked by the impersonal marker SE. Therefore, it is possible to use it to denote present time activity when necessary. Consequently, it is chiefly used with imperfective verbs in the Present Tense.¹¹ The passive is generally preferred for other tenses, although as noted by Stanojic & Popovic (1992: 116) the transitive impersonal (in their terminology 'reflexive passive') can be used for other tenses as well.

^[11] The combination of imperfective aspect and Present Tense is the only one denoting current activity in Serbian.

The extensive use of the dynamic transitive impersonal in place of the passive where the latter cannot be used (the transitive impersonal construction is indispensable for various informal communicative situations as well as for the scientific register) together with a passive-like function of backgrounding the agent, seem to have led to the incorrect, functional classification of this construction as ‘reflexive passive’.

As in other impersonals, the syntactic subject of the transitive impersonals is suppressed and the grammatical object is retained. However, the object status of the remaining syntactic argument is obscured by the fact that in Serbian it surfaces in the NOMINATIVE form generally associated with subjects and consequently triggers agreement. Therefore, it is generally argued that since in this construction the active accusative object becomes ‘passive’ nominative subject and triggers agreement, the construction should be treated as a personal ‘reflexive’ passive.

However, in keeping with the case and agreement conventions in Serbian, after the suppression of the syntactic subject the sole leftover non-oblique argument is obligatorily assigned the nominative case.¹² Nevertheless, the

^[12] The obligatory assignment of nominative to non-oblique nominal arguments irrespective of their grammatical function in the absence of another nominative nominal argument can be seen in a number of examples, for instance when the first argument of a predicate is lexically specified as dative (with verbs like *SVIDJATI SE* (like), *NEDOSTAJATI* (lack), *PRILICITI* (become), etc.). See Avgustinova et al. (1999) for an analysis of case marking and voice alternations across Slavic languages.

direct object in the transitive impersonal construction neither changes its grammatical function nor is it promoted but since the verb normally agrees with nominative arguments, agreement between the verb and the unpromoted nominative object arises.

But this is not its only possible realization as it is in passives where the object is really promoted and surfaces as the syntactic subject. Namely, in Polish (where this pattern is particularly consistent), Italian, Spanish, Romanian and, as the traditional grammars say, in ‘colloquial’ (or ungrammatical, as some grammarians describe it) use in Lithuanian, Russian, Slovene and Croatian the object can surface in its canonical ACCUSATIVE case as well as in the NOMINATIVE. In this case, there is no agreement and the verb has the default 3SG NEUTER form.

However, although the transitive impersonal constructions exhibit the alternating case pattern, their morphosyntactic properties and sense are exactly the same. Furthermore, the object status of the NOMINATIVE argument can be easily shown by applying on it the tests for subjecthood - which it fails. As for the ACCUSATIVE pattern, there is no doubt whatsoever that the construction is an impersonal active.

The last point is made in some (but not all) grammars of Serbian and

obtained using the transitive impersonal. However, the construction in (29b) being impersonal, its syntactic subject (which cannot be expressed in the form of an agent adjunct phrase like in passive) is suppressed and the sentence gets the indefinite human reference - which is clearly not what we had in mind when we set about backgrounding the active agent. So, in this respect the transitive impersonal is clearly impersonal.

As is to be expected, the ability of the transitive impersonal to replace the passive is severely limited by the requirement of verbs denoting human agents in this construction. While the following sentence if passivized would surely evoke thoughts of an anteater performing the action, the construction in (30) implies that some unspecified humans are eating the ants:

(30) Mravi se jedu.

ants.NOM.PL IMP eat.PRES.3PL

One is eating the ants./The ants are being eaten.

On the other hand, the expectation that even unaccusative transitive verbs if their subject can be construed as human will be possible in this construction is certainly fulfilled:

(31) Posle dobrog obroka tezi se kilogram vise.

after good meal weigh.PRES.3SG IMP kilogram.NOM.SG more

After a good meal one weighs a kilo more.

(32) Ima se svega dovoljno.

have.PRES.3SG IMP everything.PART.GEN enough

One has enough of everything.

The partitive genitive in (32) further confirms the genuine object status of the remaining syntactic argument in transitive impersonal constructions. The same point is also proved by the fact that nominative can alternate with genitive under negation¹³ ('Slavic genitive' Stanojic & Popovic 1992: 223) as in (33):

(33) Cele noci se nije oka/oko sklopilo.

all night IMP NEG eye.GEN/NOM close.PAST.3SG.NEUT

One hasn't slept all night.

In sum, previous discussion clearly confirms the impersonal status of the Serbian 'reflexive passive'. Therefore, it should be reanalysed and classified as a subclass of the impersonal verbal diathesis in Serbian.

^[13] Apart from accusative direct object, Serbian also uses partitive genitive. The 'negative direct object' (Stanojic & Popovic 1992: 224) is also still occasionally used instead of accusative, though not as regularly as in other Slavic languages.

Conclusion

In the previous discussion, a short overview of the different approaches to explicating passivization operations was presented, pointing out the greater explanatory power of the demotional view. The discussion also described some general patterns within passive and impersonal constructions, pointing out the importance of differentiating between passivization and impersonalization as two distinct operations yielding constructions which belong to two discrete diathesis types.

These points are further illustrated by the descriptions of the systems of the passive in English and Serbian. The descriptions throw some light on the similarities and differences between the two systems. In addition, abandoning the traditionally accepted functional criteria for establishing the status of particular constructions within the Serbian voice system and applying the established distinctions between passive and impersonal constructions in the analysis, I showed that the traditional classification of the Serbian voice system should be reanalysed. I also pointed out possible explanations for certain inconsistencies within the system of passive in English.

As for the similarities between English and Serbian, they both have basic

personal passive patterns, which are overall as similar as the general typological differences between the two languages would allow. However, the English passive system can be said to be more productive and in general more widely used in communication. The Serbian passive is more restricted in use owing in part to specific interactions between aspectual properties of Serbian verbs and tense.

Since subjects are the obligatory feature of English sentences, English naturally does not have any subjectless or impersonal constructions. On the other hand, being a subject-optional language, Serbian allows several impersonal constructions, which largely compensate for the 'deficiencies' of the passive system. Although the impersonal constructions are functionally similar to the periphrastic passive constructions both in English and Serbian, their morphosyntactic properties have been shown to characterize them as a discrete set of constructions.

Moreover, it is important to note that establishing the properties I enumerated in the previous discussion as being characteristic and/or definitional of the impersonal as opposed to the passive helps preserve a number of well-attested generalizations that apply to the passive itself. As has been shown above, the passive and impersonal alternations are essentially two different operations on the argument structure of the input

verb — the passive being valence-reducing, the impersonal valence-preserving, with different requirements on the argument structure of the input verb and different syntactic reflexes. Therefore, the resistance of the ‘reflexive passives’ across Slavic languages to the expression of an overt agent, their alternating nominative/accusative case patterns and the fact that even the unaccusative verbs take part in their alternations are not exceptions to the passive rule, but represent a separate set of expected properties within the impersonal diathesis type to which the constructions belong. This sort of analysis also confirms that the most obvious and generally recognized morphosyntactic properties of the English-type passives are defining of the periphrastic passives in Slavic languages as well and presumably of the majority of passives across languages — namely, subject demotion and object promotion to subject in the passive construction remains one of its defining properties (in the case of personal passives), while the possibility of expressing the demoted subject in an oblique agentive phrase remains if not definitional, then strongly characteristic of passivization as opposed to impersonalization.

The previous discussion has hopefully pointed out the importance of employing morphosyntactic criteria for making a distinction between constructions and arriving at a more consistent classification of a number of apparently idiosyncratic constructions ultimately positing their respective

defining properties. The discussion has also hopefully shown the significance of crosslinguistic evidence for this sort of analysis, if conclusions of any generality are to be drawn.

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