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Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society (1980), pp. 278-286

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THE PASSIVE IN SLIAMMON

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1. Overview [1]

Whether or not Sliammon, a Salishan language of the Pacific Northwest spoken 200 miles to the north of the Puget Sound area, has a true passive construction is not immediately clear. We shall see, however, that in Sliammon passive predicates, the patient, while morphologically marked as an object, behaves syntactically like a subject. Thus, Sliammon has in actuality a personal passive construction in which the subject pronoun happens to look like an object morphologically. Therefore Sliammon is not radically different from its sister language Lushootseed, which can easily be shown to have a true passive on morphological grounds.

2. The Passive in Lushootseed [2]

In "Toward a Universal Characterization of Passivization", Perlmutter and Postal (1977:399) state that "a direct object of an active clause is the (superficial) subject of the 'corresponding' passive". This formulation adequately describes the passive in Lushootseed, an American Indian language spoken in the Puget Sound area. In Lushootseed, the superficial or derived subject of a passive predicate (ex. 1) is morphologically marked like the subject of an intransitive predicate (compare ex. 3-4). Furthermore, the passive predicate itself does not carry the morpheme which marks the patient as an object -- as does the corresponding active (ex. 2). [3]

- | | | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------|
| (1) Čáx ^w a-t-əb
club-trans-intr | čəx ^w
you | 'you are clubbed' |
| (2) Čáx ^w a-t-sid
club-trans-you | čəd
I | 'I club you' |
| (3) x ^w ít'il
fall | čəx ^w
you | 'you fall' |
| (4) ʔíboš
walk | čəx ^w
you | 'you walk' |

Lushootseed forms the passive by combining the transitive marker /-t/ with the intransitive marker /-əb/ (ex. 1).

3. The Problem in Sliammon [4]

Sliammon, a closely related language spoken 200 miles to the north of the Lushootseed area, treats similar predicates somewhat differently. The predicate analogous to the Lushootseed passive appears to lack a subject (5, cf 1): morphologically it appears to have only an incorporated object so that it looks more like the corresponding active predicate (ex. 6, cf 2) than like the intransitives (ex. 7-8).

(5)	sóp'-t-si-əm club-trans-you-intr		'you are clubbed'
(6)	sóp'-t-si club-trans-you	č I	'I club you'
(7)	x ^w ə́t'əm fall	čx ^w you	'you fall'
(8)	?íməš walk	čx ^w you	'you walk'

(ex 5) shows the same strategy as in Lushootseed: the combination of the transitive suffix /-t/ and the intransitive suffix /-əm/ -- but Sliammon retains the object pronoun.

There are three possible explanations for (ex 5): (a) It is an impersonal passive (cf. Comrie 1977 and Perlmutter 1978). (b) It is not a passive at all. (c) It is a personal passive, and the one pronoun associated with it is its subject, which just happens to look like an object.

Going beyond morphology and looking at syntactic criteria, however, I will argue that the one pronoun in (5) is the syntactic subject, and that therefore this form of the predicate is indeed a personal passive.

4. Case Marking in Third Person [5]

Sliammon has a third person agent suffix /-əs/ (glossed as '(s)he'), but has no third person object pronouns. Furthermore, the NPs which designate third person subject and third person object of an active transitive predicate are morphologically unmarked: word order alone

'Jim' is promoted to subject status: just like the subject of an active predicate, it can be raised to become the object of the matrix clause. Notice now in (18 a-b) that the agent cannot be raised to become the object of the matrix clause; therefore it has been demoted from subject-hood.

(16) pápk^wa-t č s qóqəy-t-it ?ə Joe Jim 'I watch Jim
watch-trans I that beat-tr-intr being beaten up
by Joe'

(17) pápk^wa-t č Jim s qóqəy-t-it ?ə Joe (same meaning)

(18a) *pápk^wa-t č Joe s qóqəy-t-it Jim

(18b) *pápk^wa-t č ?ə Joe s qóqəy-t-it Jim

6. Ascension Copy

When the subject of an active predicate in an embedded clause is raised to object of the matrix clause, as in (14), a subject marker remains behind in the embedded clause. This is also true of first and second person. We see in (19) that the subject pronoun of the independent clause is /čx^w/. In (20) this is replaced by the pronoun /θ/, glossed as 'that you', and the second person object pronoun is attached to the matrix predicate [7]. Within the framework of Relational Grammar, this phenomenon of copying the embedded subject as a matrix object is called ascension copy.

(19) qóqəy-t čx^w Joe 'you beat Joe up'
beat-trans you

(20) pápk^wa-t-si č θ qóqəy-t Joe 'I watch you beat
watch-trans-you I that Joe up'
you

(17-18) provided evidence that a third person patient of a passive predicate is subject of that predicate. (23-24) give parallel evidence for second person. The patient of the passive clause in (22) is marked morphologically the same as the patient of the active clause in (21), while the agent is not marked the same (cf 11-12).

(21) qóqəy-t-si-əs Joe 'Joe is beating you up'
beat-trans-you-(s)he

(22) qóqəy-t-si-əm ?ə Joe 'you're being beaten up by
Joe'

Parallel to (17-18), (23-24) illustrate that with passive predicates, agents are demoted from subject with a concomitant promotion to subjecthood for patients.

(23) pápk^wa-t-si č s qóqəy-t-si-it ?ə Joe
 watch -trans-you I that beat-tr-you-intr
 'I watch you being beaten up by Joe'

(24a) *pápk^wa-t č Joe s qóqəy-t-si-it

(24b) *pápk^wa-t č ?ə Joe s qóqəy-t-si-it

7. Lack of Object-to-Object Ascension Copy

We have seen (in 14-15) that a third person object of an active predicate cannot be raised to become the object of the matrix clause. Let us look at parallel evidence for second person.

In (25a-b) we see that the subject of an active predicate is raised to become the object of the matrix clause, just like (14) and (15).

(25a) qóqəy-t-si-əs Joe 'Joe is beating you up'
 beat-trans-you-(s)he

(25b) pápk^wa-t č Joe s qóqəy-t-si-s 'I watch Joe
 watch-trans I that beating you up'

There is, however, no way to copy the object of an embedded active predicate: (26a) would be a simple copy keeping the subordinating proclitic /s/; (26b) would be parallel to (20) in that the pronoun /θ/ 'that you' appears; (26c) would illustrate the case where both /s/ and /θ/ were absent. All three examples are ungrammatical.

(26a) *pápk^wa-t-si č s qóqəy-t-si-s Joe

(26b) *pápk^wa-t-si č θ qóqəy-t-si-s Joe

(26c) *pápk^wa-t-si č qóqəy-t-si-s Joe

Just as Sliammon blocks object-to-object raising in the third person active, so does it block object-to-object ascension copy in the second person active. However, we have seen that Sliammon does allow ascension of the patient in both the second and third person passive, thus providing evidence that the pronoun morpheme which looks like an object is really the superficial subject of the passive.

8. Morphology versus Syntax

Sliammon is not alone in having syntax and morphology conflict in the passive. Timberlake (1976:567), in his article "Subject Properties in the North Russian Passive",

wrote

the underlying subject in the N[orth] R[ussian] passive constructions behaves like a subject with respect to all rules except case and agreement.

This analogy holds even though the difference between the NR data and the Sliammon is that the NR agent has been demoted from being morphologically marked as subject **while still behaving** syntactically as subject, while the Sliammon patient has been promoted to behaving syntactically as subject even though it is morphologically marked as object.

Morphological marking appears to be important to Dixon (1979:119) when he writes in his article "Ergativity":

One major use [of the passive] is to bring an O NP (which would otherwise be marked accusative case) into a surface function where it bears the unmarked nominative inflection.

It can be debated to what extent this statement characterizes Sliammon. It is possible, for example, to analyze second person as not deriving from an NP at all [8]. Furthermore, in third person, where there are indisputable NPs, object and subject are not morphologically distinguishable.

On the other hand, Dixon's statement accurately characterizes Sliammon in that the passive does bring an object into the function of a subject without undergoing case marking -- which some consider a low level rule, as does Dixon (1979:119): [9]

case marking is plainly a late rule of the grammar, applying to surface structures after all syntactic operations (including passive/antipassive) have applied.

Why should the subject of a Sliammon passive look, morphologically, like an object? There are two possible reasons. One is that it is semantically the recipient of an action, so it should be marked as the recipient. The second is that passives in Sliammon are transparently derived from actives with the simple addition of a suffix: keeping the original object marked as an object simplifies the rule for deriving a passive.

9. A Possible Continuum of Passivity

Of Cowichan, which is even more closely related to Sliammon than is Lushootseed, Hukari (1976) writes

Cowichan passives represent a mixed category in surface form. They are based on transitive stems and permit inflection for object but not for subject. Two passive constructions exist: the medio-passive ending in /-m/ and the dependent passive ending in /-t/.

This situation is the same as in Sliammon, which has the endings /-əm/ and /-it/ respectively. Illustrative morphological data are: (Hukari, personal communication)

(27a) lémə-t-əs t^θ Joe t^θ Jim 'Joe looks at Jim'
look-trans-(s)he the the

(27b) lémə-t-əm ʔəʔ Joe t^θ Jim 'Jim's looked at by Joe'
look-trans-intr by the

(27c) lémə-t-sámə cən 'I look at you'
look-trans-you I

(27d) lémə-t-sá·-m ʔəʔ Joe 'you're looked at by Joe'
look-trans-you-intr by

In Lushootseed the patient of the passive is overtly marked as subject (5). In Sliammon and Cowichan, on the other hand, the patient of the passive is marked the same as the patient of the active.

I have presented data which show the patient of the passive in Sliammon having subject properties. To date, these data have not been replicated in Cowichan [10]. If they cannot be, then it may be possible to make a case for a continuum:

Cowichan-----Sliammon-----Lushootseed
(less passive) (more passive)

Where the patient of the Cowichan passive shows the fewest subject properties and the patient of the Lushootseed passive shows the most subject properties.

NOTES

[1] I wish to thank Tom Hukari of the University of Victoria, Sarah Bell of the University of British Columbia, and Marilyn Silva and Jack DuBois of the University of California, Berkeley, for their patience in discussing the data contained herein with me; also Tom Hukari and Suzanne Rose for reading an early draft, Marilyn Silva for her considerable editorial expertise, and Danny Alford for typing the manuscript. Needless to say, any mistakes remain my own.

[2] For a published description of the same situation using cognate morphemes in the closely related Squamish language, see Kuipers (1967:68-70).

[3] Data from Thom Hess (1976 and personal communication).

[4] This language was originally called Comox, a name given by Franz Boas. However, "Comox" is a foreign name, given them by the Kwakiutl with whom Boas worked. The language consists of four dialects: /θáθútx̣w/ on Vancouver Island and, on the mainland, /x̣wumáiḳw/, /x̣áhus/, and /ṭʰamən/, which is pronounced in English as "Sliammon".

[5] For a description of the same situation in the closely related Halkomelem language see Hukari (1976) and Leslie (1979).

[6] For additional illustrative data see Davis 1978(b).

[7] For a full exposition of the pronominal system see Davis 1978(a).

[8] For full argumentation of the identical situation in Cowichan, see Hukari (1976).

[9] As a possible counter-example to Dixon, note that in North Russian case marking is the only subject property lost in demotion -- while in Sliammon case marking is the only subject **property** not acquired in promotion.

[10] Cowichan is the Vancouver Island dialect of the Halkomelem language. Donna Gerdts, working on Halkomelem spoken on the mainland of British Columbia, has said (personal communication) that she has found syntactic rules that apply to the patient of the passive but not to the patient of the active; Tom Hukari (personal communication) has said that he has not found the same restriction in the Vancouver Island dialect.

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