




## Who is the agent when it is left implicit?

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## Bird's eye view

- Different ways of forming a "passive"
  - Saturation (e.g. Chierchia 2004)
  - Reduction (Reinhart 2002)
- Not all ways are available to children from the outset (Borer & Wexler 1987, Babyonyshev et al. 2001, Wexler 2004)
- We will provide experimental evidence from (the lack of) disjoint reference effects for the adjectival nature of children's early passives



## The nature of the verbal passive

- Passive participle
- Agent argument semantically present
- Internal argument appears in subject position

(1) [the woman<sub>i</sub> is being [dressed t<sub>i</sub> ]]

(e.g. Siewierska 1984, Jaeggli 1986, Baker et al. 1989, Keenan & Dryer 2006, Bruening 2014)



## Presence external argument

By-phrase  
(2) The woman is being dressed by the girl

Agent controls PRO (Roeper 1987)  
(3a) The ship was sunk [PRO to collect insurance]  
(3b) #The ship sank [PRO to collect insurance]

Agent-oriented adverbs  
(4) The woman is carefully being dressed

Disjoint reference  
(5) The woman is being dressed (#she is doing it all by herself)

(Baker et al. 1989, Bhatt & Pancheva 2006, Landau 2010)



## Disjoint reference

- Existentially quantified external argument (Williams 1987, Lasnik 1997)
  - i) **dress** (agent, theme)
  - ii) Saturation:  $\exists x$  (**dress** (x, theme))
  - iii) The woman is being dressed:  $\exists x$  (x is dressing the woman) (adapted from Reinhart 2002: 239)
- Implicature of disjointness
  - (6a) The woman is being dressed, namely by herself
  - (6b) Someone is dressing the woman, namely herself
  - (6c) \*She is dressing the woman, namely herself

(Kratzer 2000, see McIntyre 2012 and Bruening 2014 for a recent discussion, Isabelle Charvavel p.c.)



## The nature of an adjectival "passive"

- Passive participle
- Agent argument semantically absent
- Sole argument merged externally

(7a) [the woman is still [<sub>adjP</sub> hidden]]  
(7b) the woman is (\*still) hit

(cf. Kratzer 2000, Embick 2004, Meltzer-Asscher 2011, Bruening 2014)

  
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### Absence external argument

- No by-phrase  
(8) \*The woman is still hidden by the man
- No control  
(9) #The woman is still hidden to confuse the director
- No agent-oriented adverbs  
(10) #The woman is still carefully hidden
- Reflexive interpretation possible

  
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### Acquisition

- Children's early passives must be adjectival (UPR)  
(Borer & Wexler 1987, Wexler 2004 and subsequent work)
- Particular difficulties with subject experiencer verbs  
(Maratsos et al. 1987 a.o., replicated in Dutch (our work))

DUTCH	Actional		Subject experiencer	
	Short	Long	Short	Long
4-year-olds	76%	74%	47%	50%
5-year-olds	98%	96%	76%	63%

  
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(Maratsos et al. 1987 a.o., replicated in Dutch (our work))
- Stative interpretation
  - Evidence from corpus data (Israel et al. 2000)
  - Evidence from experiments (Gavarró & Parramon 2011, Oliva & Wexler in prep.)
- Children overwhelmingly produce (adjectival) *get*-passives in experimental settings  
(Crain et al. 2009)

  
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### Specification

- Children's earliest passives involve reduction (no external argument) instead of saturation (semantically present agent argument)

Implications:

- Adjective
- No external argument
  - No by-phrase
  - Control
  - No trigger for disjoint reference

  
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### Disjoint reference experiment

- Experimental prediction:  
Children allow coreference in more cases than adults
- In particular, (short) passive sentences are ambiguous between a reflexive and a disjoint interpretation

(14a) [the woman<sub>i</sub> is being [<sub>AdjP</sub> touched]]      Child  
(14b) [the woman<sub>i</sub> is being [<sub>VP</sub> touched t<sub>i</sub>]]      Adult

  
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### Experiment I: Dutch

- 9 3-year-olds, 14 4-year-olds, 15 5-year-olds
- Two-choice picture selection task  
Ambiguity predicts 50% score
- Two conditions:  
Reflexive ('de man wast zich' *the man is washing himself*)  
Passive ('de man wordt gewassen' *the man is being washed*)
- 8 items per condition (and 4 fillers)  
4 grooming verbs (zich) (wash, shave, make-up, dress)  
4 non-reflexive (paint, comb, touch, point)

(a) de man wordt gewassen (the man is being washed)  
 (b) de man wast zich (the man is washing (himself))

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### Dutch children

Y-axis: percentage correct

Reflexive condition: **reflexive** interpretation

Passive condition: **disjoint** interpretation

Age Group	Reflexive (%)	Passive (%)
3-year-olds	~90	~50
4-year-olds	~90	~80
5-year-olds	~95	~95
Adults	100	100

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### Experiment II: English

- 2 3-year-olds, 20 4-year-olds, 12 5-year-olds (one excluded from analysis)
- Three conditions:
  - Reflexive (the man is washing himself)
  - Passive (the man is being washed)
  - Someone (someone is washing the man)
- 8 items per condition
  - 4 grooming verbs (wash, shave, dress, comb)
  - 4 non-reflexive (spray, paint, touch, point)

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Point to the picture in which...

- ...the woman is dressing herself
- ...the woman is being dressed
- ...someone is dressing the woman

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### English children

Age Group	Reflexive (%)	Someone (%)	Passive (%)
3-year-olds	100	~95	~75
4-year-olds	100	~95	~75
5-year-olds	100	~95	~90
Adults	100	100	100

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### Discussion

- For most 3- and some 4-year-olds, the passive is ambiguous between a reflexive and non-reflexive interpretation
- Comprehension of actional passives and disjointness develop at the same age
- No effect of verb type
- For those children, these participles seem to be adjectives without an agent argument
- Resultant-state adjectival passives
- Children make causativization "errors" (Bowerman 1996). More causatives means more to decausativize?

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## Growing passive



- Not all passive-like structures are created in the same way
- Children's initial passives do not contain an agent argument
  - Target-state > Resultant-state > Verbal
- They project a “simpler”, adjectival structure