Agentivity, causation and passive participles in Finnish

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In English, non-canonical passives with get (e.g. Bill got killed) are often analyzed as intransitive variants of causative sentences with get (e.g. John got Bill killed), where the subject of the passive is assumed to have raised from inside the participial phrase complement (i.e. [PtcP Bill killed]). The same line of analysis is extended to many other uses of get, including the patterns Bill got ready/John got Bill ready and Bill got into trouble/John got Bill into trouble (e.g. Haegeman 1985).

In Finnish, agreeing passives with tulla ‘get/become’ and joutua ‘get/end up’ (1a) show a similar pattern in relation to causative sentences with saada ‘get/receive’ (1b). A corresponding relation exists even between many other uses of tulla/joutua and saada, as shown in (2) and (3):

1a. Pekka tuli/joutui tape-tuksi.
   Pekkanom get-past.3sg kill-PassPrtc-translative
   ‘Pekka got killed’

1b. Jukka sa-i Pekka-n tape-tuksi.
   Jukkanom get-past.3sg Pekka-accusative kill-PassPrtc-translative
   ‘Jukka got Pekka killed’

2a. Pekka tul-i valmiiksi.
   Pekkanom get-past.3sg ready-translative
   ‘Pekka got / became ready’

2b. Jukka sa-i Pekka-n valmiiksi.
   Jukkanom get-past.3sg Pekka-accusative ready-translative
   ‘Jukka got Pekka ready’

3a. Pekka joutui pulaan.
   Pekkanom get-past.3sg trouble-illative
   ‘Pekka got into trouble’

3b. Jukka sa-i Pekka-n pulaan.
   Jukkanom get-past.3sg Pekka-accusative trouble-illative
   ‘Jukka got Pekka into trouble’

In the literature on Finnish, (1a) and (2a) are almost invariably treated as active sentences containing a copula (tulla/joutua) and an adjectival phrase (i.e. a predicative adjective; tapetuksi/valmiiksi). (3a) is an active sentence containing a lexical verb (joutua) and a noun phrase (i.e. a locative adverbial; pulaan).

This talk has two goals: first, I will show that (1a) displays properties that strongly suggest for a passive analysis for such data. These properties are not present in the ‘copular’ or ‘lexical verb’ uses of tulla/joutua. I will then show that many of these properties originate from inside the participial phrase, and they can therefore even be observed in the causative sentence in (1b). A case in point is the ambiguity between an agentive and a causative reading in both (1a) and (1b). As (2a-b) and (3a-b) do not contain participial phrases, they are also not ambiguous between these two readings. Secondly, I will assess the idea that the subject of the passive in (1a) has raised from inside the participial phrase complement; I will show that in Finnish, an alternative line of analysis – proposed in e.g. Huang (1999) and Butler & Tsoulas (2006) – where the data are treated as control constructions, is able to explain the behaviour of the data in a maximally simple and elegant way.