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WHAT IS A PASSIVE? THE CASE OF FINNISH*

Satu Manninen & Diane Nelson

Abstract. Several previous authors have argued that Finnish lacks a true passive construction, and relabel the form “indefinite,” “impersonal” or “suppressive.” In this paper, we first devise a set of criteria for passives cross-linguistically; we then present syntactic and morphological evidence to show that the Finnish construction displays all the key features we would expect from a passive.

1. Introduction

Passivisation has been a core object of study since the earliest generative theories, particularly within the Chomskian frameworks (Chomsky 1965, 1981) and Relational Grammar (Perlmutter & Postal 1977, Perlmutter 1978). The goal has often been to characterise passivisation in terms of transformations/movement and lexical rules which are universal. A number of typological studies have also attempted to define a set of cross-linguistic criteria for identifying passives (Comrie 1977, Siewierska 1984, Keenan 1985). This paper looks at data from Finnish and has two aims: first, we will contribute to the theoretical discussion by proposing an analysis within the minimalist framework of Chomsky (2000, 2001) which is able to accommodate passivisation of all classes of verbs – including unaccusative intransitive and copular verbs – under a single operation, and which can be implemented for a broad range of languages. Secondly, we will contribute to the typological debate and argue, contra previous work, that Finnish is a language with true passive constructions.

Finnish, a Finno-Ugric language, makes an interesting test case for an analysis of passivisation because it displays a set of verbal alternations which have been labelled “passive” in traditional grammars (e.g. Setälä 1922, Kettunen & Vaula 1956, Penttilä 1963, Siro 1964, Hakulinen 1978):1

(1) a. Diane tappaa etana-n.
Diane. NOM kill.3SG slug-ACC
‘Diane will kill the slug.’

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1 The pronoun they in the translations of (1b) and (2b) is intended as a generic. The following abbreviations will be used for cases in Finnish in this paper: ACC = accusative; PART = partitive; INESS = inessive; ADESS = adessive; ALLAT = allative; ELAT = elative; ILLAT = illative.
b. Etana tape-taan.
   slug NOM kill PASS
   ‘The slug will be killed. / They will kill the slug.’

(2) a. Satu jo-i shamppanja-n.
   Satu NOM drank 3SG champagne ACC
   ‘Satu drank the champagne.’

b. Shamppanja juo-tiin.
   champagne NOM drink PASS PAST
   ‘The champagne was drunk. / They drank the champagne.’

The active transitive sentences in (1a) and (2a) display standard nominative-accusative case and active verbal morphology. The “passive” sentences in (1b) and (2b) are formed by affixation of the morpheme –taan and –(t)tiin, which signal nonpast and past tense, respectively. In both cases the underlying accusative object resurfaces as a preverbal nominative DP, suggesting that standard promotion to subject has occurred. However, no clear agreement morphology is triggered on the finite verb, and the agent may remain unspecified (i.e. there is no equivalent of the English agent by-phrase).

Despite the superficial similarities to many commonly-studied Indo-European languages, several recent proposals, including Shore (1986, 1988), Tommola (1993) and Blevins (2003), have argued that Finnish constructions as in (1b) and (2b) are not passives. Instead, they relabel the construction an “indefinite” (Shore), “suppressive” (Tommola) or “subjectless impersonal” (Blevins). The theoretical approaches of these authors vary, but they share certain empirical motivation, including an apparent lack of agreement morphology and agent phrases, the classes of verbs allowed as input, and the case of the derived subject.

The paper is structured as follows: in section 2, we will look at cross-linguistic criteria for passives: we will show that languages vary with regard to how strictly they follow these criteria, and that different types of passives often display very different properties. Therefore, the presence of a particular property does not automatically guarantee that the construction in question is a passive, while the absence of this property does not guarantee that it is not a passive. We will assume, however, that the presence/absence of a number of key properties will serve as indication of the true nature of the construction. In section 3 we will discuss the main arguments against a passive analysis for Finnish presented in the literature, and in section 4 we will present our own analysis of passivisation. We will show that the Finnish construction follows the predictions of our system, and that it displays a number of key properties we would expect of a passive: our conclusion is, then, that sentences like (1b) and (2b) look like passives because they are passives.
2. What is a passive?

In classic generative theories (e.g. Chomsky 1957, 1965), the passive construction was viewed as the *transformation* par excellence, because it is a morphosyntactic operation (3a) on an input sentence (3b) that does not alter propositional content (3c):

(3) a. NP1 V NP2 → NP2 AUX V + EN by NP1
   b. Sam kissed that girl.
   NP1 V NP2
   c. That girl was kissed (by Sam).
   NP2 AUX V + EN by NP1

In passivisation, the underlying object (NP2) is raised to sentence-initial position. Note that not all operations where the object ends up in this position count as passivisation. Comrie (1977), Siewierska (1984) and Keenan (1985) distinguish passives from various kinds of left-dislocated structures, for example – compare (3c) with the data in (4):

(4) a. Slugs I hate.
   b. That girl, Sam kissed her.

In a left-dislocated structure, the moved NP is in a marked, non-subject position, while in a passive it is in the unmarked subject position. In the dislocated structure, the underlying subject also remains in situ, while in the passive it is demoted to a non-argument position with a *by*-phrase. Finally, the dislocated structure has no special verbal morphology, while the passive often does.

Various authors point out that not all languages have a passive, and that languages that do may have more than just one type of passive construction. Siewierska (1984), see also Keenan (1985), distinguishes between “personal” and “impersonal” passives. Personal passives typically have an overt subject with semantic content (i.e. not an expletive). The subject corresponds to a non-subject (typically a patient but recipients, benefactives, instrumentals and locatives also occur) in the active, and triggers (full or partial) person, number and/or gender agreement on the finite verb. Impersonal passives typically lack a specified overt subject, and the finite verb shows default agreement (usually third person singular). Below, we will look at some key properties of passives cross-linguistically; we will also examine how the different sub-types of passive behave with regard to these criteria.

2.1. Transitivity

For many linguists, the key requirement for passivisation is transitivity (i.e. “basic” or “prototypical” passives are formed from transitive verbs).
The contrast between impersonal and personal passives also relies upon transitivity: in Indo-European traditions, impersonal passives are often associated with intransitive verbs, and personal passives with transitive verbs (data from Comrie 1977:51, Siewierska 1984:96–97):

(5) a. Wir tanzten.   German  
we.nom danced  

b. Es wurde getanzt.  
it was danced  
‘There was dancing.’

c. Gestern wurde getanzt.  
yesterday was danced  
‘Yesterday there was dancing.’

(6) a. Er tötete den Löwen.   German  
he.nom killed the lion.acc  

b. Der Löwe wurde (von ihm) getötet.  
the lion.nom became (by him) killed  
‘The lion was killed (by him).’

c. *Es wurde den Löwen getötet.  
it was the lion.acc killed

In German, intransitive verbs like *tanzen ‘dance’ only undergo impersonal passivisation so that the sentence is introduced by the expletive es ‘it’ or by a locative or temporal adverbial. Transitive verbs like töt en ‘kill’ only undergo personal passivisation: the internal argument is raised to grammatical subject position and receives nominative rather than accusative case. (6c) shows that the grammatical subject cannot be an expletive.

However, data as in (7) show that there is no one-to-one correspondence between transitivity and the type of passivisation: verbs like helfen ‘help’ are similar to töt en in that they denote canonical agent-patient predicates. Yet they pattern with *tanzen in that they allow only impersonal passivisation:

(7) a. Der Lehrer half dem Schüler.   German  
the teacher.nom helped the student.dat  

b. *Der Schüler wurde (vom Lehrer) geholfen.  
the student.nom became (by teacher) helped  
‘The student was helped (by the teacher).’

2 It is sometimes suggested that verbs like helfen, because they assign dative case to the internal argument, are not transitive but intransitive. But this line of reasoning cannot explain the fact that semantically, both helfen and töt en are two-place agent-patient predicates.
The reason why töten allows only personal while helfen allows impersonal passivisation appears to be not transitivity per se but case: töten assigns accusative case to its internal argument, while helfen assigns dative. This suggests that transitivity alone cannot be a criterion for impersonal versus personal passivisation in languages that show a clear contrast between the two constructions. In Finnish, as we will see, most classes of verbs can undergo passivisation, and we argue that both impersonal and personal passives are subsumed under a single operation. This means that transitivity should be rejected as a useful criterion for Finnish. We return to the issue of case in section 4.4.

2.2. Agreement

According to Keenan (1985:255–256) passives may exhibit different agreement patterns from corresponding active constructions: passive verbs may fail to agree with their subjects completely, or they may have a different set of agreement affixes from active verbs, for example. Agreement is also used to distinguish between personal and impersonal passives: according to Siewierska (1984:94–95) agreement between the promoted phrase and the finite verb is a typical feature of personal (but not impersonal) passives cross-linguistically. For example, in Latin personal passives (8), the sentence-initial XP triggers full person and number agreement on the finite verb, while in impersonal passives (9) the verb displays default agreement, irrespective of the person and number features of the sentence-initial XP (if there is one):

(8) a. Hortus pulcher ama-tur. Latin
   garden.NOM beautiful.NOM love-pass.3sg
   ‘The beautiful garden is loved.’

   b. Hortī pulchriī ama-ntur.
   garden.PL.NOM beautiful.PL.NOM love-pass.3pl
   ‘The beautiful gardens are loved.’

(9) a. Captivis parsūm est.
   prisoner.PL.DAT spare.PCP be.3sg
   ‘The prisoners were spared.’

   b. Pugnatum est.
   fought.PCP be.3sg
   ‘There was fierce fighting.’
In section 4.5. we argue that Finnish passives may trigger either default or partial number agreement, though this alternation does not correlate with a personal/impersonal passive contrast as in Latin. However, we take either form of agreement to count as criteria for passivisation.

2.3. Input verbs

One of the most contentious issues in classifying passives as impersonal or personal concerns lexical restrictions on which verbs can passivise. The data from Dutch in (10)–(13) led Perlmutter (1978) to argue that only intransitive verbs which have an underlying logical subject available for demotion/deletion can undergo impersonal passivization. (10) may passivise as (11) because it has an underlying logical subject available for demotion. But because (12) lacks an underlying subject, it also resists passivisation:

(10) Het publiek murmelde gedurend het concert. Dutch the audience murmured during the concert

(11) Er werd door het publiek gedurend het concert gemurmeld. it is by the audience during the concert murmured

(12) Het beekje murmelde zachtjes. the brook murmured gently

(13) *Er werd door het beekje zachtjes gemurmeld. it is by the brook gently murmured

Blevins (2003) extends this analysis, and subsumes impersonal passives within a larger class of passives which are formed by a generalised demotion operation on an underlying logical subject. More specifically, Blevins argues that only verbs which have an underlying logical subject available for demotion/deletion – unergative intransitives and transitives being a case in point – can serve as the input to passivisation. Contrastingly, if an underlying logical subject is not available to demote, the verb cannot serve as the input. Blevins further argues that constructions which seem to allow impersonal passives of unaccusative verbs in languages like Finnish, Estonian and the Balto-Slavic group are not in fact passives, partly because there would be no generalised rule to account for their formation, and partly because they display other properties that he deems to be typical of active subjectless constructions. (Blevins calls these constructions impersonals; it is important to note that an impersonal passive is not the same as Blevins’ impersonal). In section 4 we will
present an alternative analysis of passivisation which will accommodate even the unaccusative class. Like Blevins, we will subsume both impersonal and personal passives under a single morphosyntactic process.

2.4. Agent by-phrases

In standard grammar books, overt agent phrases (i.e. the so-called agent by-phrases) are often mentioned as the characteristic of passive constructions (see e.g. Quirk et al. 1972:801–802 for English), although cross-linguistically, most passives typically lack such phrases (e.g. Siewierska 1984:35, Keenan 1985:263 and the references cited therein). For languages which allow agent phrases in passives, in some languages these are obligatory (e.g. Kota, Palauan), in others optional (e.g. English, Swedish). Some languages disallow by-phrases in passives altogether (e.g. Latvian).

The term agent phrase is actually somewhat misleading, as the entity that they introduce need not always correspond to a semantic agent in the active. In (14), for example, they introduce a possessor and a theme:

(14) a. A Picasso was owned by the company.
    b. The speech was followed by discussion.

In line with Blevins (2003), we will assume that although many languages lack agent phrases for passives, the presence of this phrase or of a specified agent in a given construction will count as evidence for passivisation. In section 4, we will show, contra previous work, that the Finnish construction does allow a specified agent phrase.

2.5. Passive morphology

Morphology is one of the key diagnostics for passivisation cross-linguistically (e.g. Siewierska 1984:30, Keenan 1985:250–251). Passives are usually, although not always, morphologically marked in contrast to active verb forms. Languages may form passives either morphologically, with special marking (e.g. affixation) on the lexical verb, or periphrastically, with the help of auxiliary verbs. Swedish is a language that makes use of both processes. Note that Swedish has two different auxiliaries for passive constructions (see Siewierska 1984:chapter 4 and Keenan 1985:257–260 for further discussion of passive auxiliaries). According to Thorell (1973:135–138) the Swedish morphological passive (15a) emphasises the verbal action, while the periphrastic vara ‘be’ and bli ‘become’ constructions focus on the event as a whole (15b) or on the end result (15c):
The way in which passives are formed may also be linked to the impersonal/personal distinction: in Estonian, for example, morphological passives are always impersonal, while periphrastic passives are personal (Rajandi 1999, Vihman 2001, 2002, 2004, and Hiietam 2003).

The presence of verbal morphology does not of course entail that the construction is a passive. In many languages, morphology associated with the passive also occurs in other, non-passive, forms. The Swedish –s affix can be found, for example, in middle constructions (16a) and in imperatives (16b):

(16) a. Fönstret öppna-s. Swedish
    window-def.neutr open-s
    ‘The window opens.’ (i.e. this window can be opened)

b. Riv-s inte!
    rip-s not
    ‘Must not be ripped!’ (i.e. don’t rip this!)

In standard written Finnish, the situation is more straightforward. The distribution of the affix –taan is restricted to just passive constructions and is therefore an unambiguous marker. We will return to this in section 4.

2.6. Cross-linguistic criteria for passives: A summary

In the preceding discussion, we have looked at cross-linguistic criteria for identifying passives. We have seen that different types of passives behave differently with regard to these criteria. Secondly, languages may differ with regard to how strictly they follow these criteria: even languages which have uncontroversial passives need not display all the characteristics mentioned, particularly for languages which have several types of passive such as Latin and German.

However, even if a language need not display all the characteristics of a passive, the presence of a key cluster of properties may be taken as evidence that the language in question has passives. The central
aim of this paper is to show, contra previous analyses, that Finnish has a passive construction. We argue, first, that Finnish verbal morphology encodes the active/passive distinction exactly as cross-linguistic studies of passivisation would predict, with a dedicated affix for passives (section 4.1). Second, we discuss evidence for demotion of the input subject via a generalised morphosyntactic rule that deletes the highest available human argument (sections 4.1 and 4.2), making it unavailable for anaphoric binding (section 4.7); this argument may then resurface in the form of an agent by-phrase (section 4.6). While we adopt a fundamentally demotion-based approach for passivisation, we also show that the Finnish construction displays syntactic properties associated with promotion. Part of this line of argumentation entails that the promoted XPs end up in an unmarked structural “subject” position (section 4.3). We also present relevant evidence from case (section 4.4) and agreement (section 4.5), and discuss constraints on the input verb (section 4.2). Where relevant, we will present data from non-passive true impersonal constructions in Finnish to illustrate certain contrasts. However, a systematic analysis of impersonals is outside the scope of this paper. Before presenting our analysis, however, we will discuss the main arguments presented in the literature against a passive analysis for Finnish.

3. The Finnish passive?

According to Shore (1986, 1988) the Finnish construction diverges from “prototypical” passives to such an extent that it cannot be analysed as a passive. Shore’s claim is adopted in e.g. Tommola (1993) and Löflund (1998). Blevins (2003) also argues that Finnish lacks a passive, mainly on the basis of the classes of input verbs.

In our view, one of the biggest problems with Shore’s claim that the Finnish construction diverges from “prototypical” passives so that cannot be analysed as a passive is her notion of the term “prototypical” passive. In Shore’s work, a prototypical passive corresponds fully to Latin and English personal passives – in fact, Latin and English are the only other languages even mentioned in her discussion of the “universal” passive. Shore’s point is that, because the systems set up to describe the properties of Latin and English have often been exported directly into the description of many non-Indo-European languages, including Finnish, they fail to capture the unique properties of these languages. While this may partly be true – many early descriptions of Finnish stated, for example, that Finnish only has six cases (instead of fifteen) which correspond to the six cases found in Latin – one should be careful when using it as an argument against languages having any universal properties at all. At
its worst, the urge to emphasize the unique nature of each and every language will result in a failure to see similarities where they really exist.

Shore (1986, 1988, see also Tommola 1993:50–52 and Löflund 1998:23–36) identifies several key ways in which the Finnish construction diverges from its “prototypical” counterpart. She observes, for example, that Finnish allows almost all categories of verb to passivise, whereas English only allows transitive agent-patient verbs to undergo this process. Another key claim is that in Finnish, unlike in English, passivisation cannot involve promotion of an underlying object to grammatical subject. This is because the subject position may appear to be empty so that the sentence is introduced by the finite verb or — the more frequent option — by a locative or temporal adverbial:

(17) a. Tape-ttiin etanoi-ta puutarha-ssa. Finnish
   kill-PASS.PAST slugs-PART garden-INESS
   ‘Slugs were killed / They killed slugs in the garden.’

   b. Puutarha-ssa tape-ttiin etanoi-ta.
   garden-INESS kill-PASS.PAST slugs-PART
   ‘In the garden slugs were killed / they killed slugs.’

   c. Eilen tape-ttiin paljon etanoi-ta.
   yesterday kill-PASS.PAST many slugs-PART
   ‘Yesterday many slugs were killed / they killed many slugs.’

Shore (1988:156) argues that the sentence-initial adverbials in data like (17b–c) cannot be grammatical subjects, and she doubts that the sentence-initial objects in (1b) and (2b) are subjects either, because they fail to trigger agreement on the finite verb. Shore (1988:155) considers the lack of agreement “significant in view of the fact that finite verbs are generally marked for number and person in Finnish.” The examples in (19) show that, unlike the active finite verbs in (18), passive verbs indeed do not agree with the sentence-initial XP:

(18) a. Minä tapoi-n etanoi-ta.
   I.NOM killed-1SG slugs-PART
   ‘I killed slugs.’

   b. Diane tappoi etanoi-ta.
   Diane.NOM killed.3SG slugs-PART
   ‘Diane killed slugs.’

   c. Diane ja Satu tappoi-vat etanoi-ta.
   Diane and Satu.NOM killed-3PL slugs-PART
   ‘Diane and Satu killed slugs.’
In discussing examples like these, Shore links the grammatical subject position in Finnish with agreement morphology. At the same time, Finnish has a number of other constructions where the grammatical subject does not trigger agreement on the finite verb (see section 4.5): the existence of such constructions weakens Shore’s claim that the sentence-initial XPs in passives cannot be grammatical subjects. In section 4.3, we will show that the XPs in (17b–c) and (19) actually do appear in the grammatical subject position. A further problem with Shore is that she ignores the observations made by e.g. Siewierska (1984:94–95) and Keenan (1985:255–256) that cross-linguistically, passive verbs tend to exhibit very different agreement patterns from active verbs, and that agreement seems to be a property of only personal passives anyway. In this context, we feel that the lack of agreement in data like (17b–c) and (19) can hardly be used to rule out Finnish having any passives at all.

Thirdly, Shore (1986:30–31, 1988:171–172, see also Tommola 1993: 51–52, Löflund 1998:27–29) claims that the Finnish construction cannot contain an overt agent phrase. She gives examples of adessive case-marked agents, which are available in other constructions in Finnish, including the causative: compare the passive (20a) to the causative (20b):³

³ (20a) would be well-formed if Dianella is interpreted as an instrument (compare Etana tapettiin vasaralla ‘The slug was killed with a hammer.’). The sentence would then imply that Diane was a concrete instrument that was used to kill the slugs.

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does not guarantee that the construction is not a passive. In section 4 we will show, contra Shore, that the Finnish construction in fact can contain specified agent phrases.

Fourthly, Shore (1986:36–40, 64–79) considers the function of passive constructions in a language an important factor. She discusses a number of sentences where the Finnish passive has a different meaning and distribution from its English counterpart (i.e. she shows that the Finnish construction cannot always be translated into English with a passive, and vice versa) and concludes that the two constructions are functionally so distinct from each other that they cannot be taken to represent two sides of the same coin. Shore’s overall conclusion is, then, that because “none of the universal criteria [for passive] apply for Finnish” (1986:76) and because the Finnish construction “does not correspond to an English passive in either form or function” (1988:169), the construction cannot be analysed as a passive at all. Unfortunately, after rejecting a passive analysis for Finnish, Shore does not discuss the wider implications of what an “indefinite” really is and exactly what kinds of processes produce such constructions (argument demotion/deletion; what the position of the sentence-initial XPs is; what the role of the morphology is, etc.).

Blevins (2003) rules out Finnish passives on very different grounds (for arguments against this analysis, see e.g. Hiietam & Manninen 2004). He first looks at data from a range of languages, including Finnish, Estonian, the Balto-Slavic group and Celtic, and distinguishes two operations: passivisation and impersonalisation. Passivisation, Blevins (2003:507) argues, “reduces the lexical valency of the predicate by deleting the logical subject.” Passivisation of a transitive verb yields an intransitive whose underlying object is promoted to subject (e.g. 6b), while passivisation of an unergative intransitive yields a subjectless output (e.g. 5b–c). For Blevins, one of the main diagnostics for passivisation involves then the classes of available input verbs: because passivisation targets underlying logical subjects and deletes them, a verb which lacks a logical subject, i.e. is unaccusative, cannot form the input. Blevins therefore sees passivisation as a generalised deletion/demotion operation. Blevins’ motivation is partly theory-internal: a syntactic process that derives passives from unaccusatives is difficult to characterise, since neither a “demotion” nor a “promotion” account yields explanatory adequacy. He rejects a passive analysis for these constructions, and labels them instead subjectless impersonals.

Impersonalisation, according to Blevins (2003:508), is “a valence-preserving operation that suppresses the syntactic realisation of a subject.” Impersonalisation of a transitive verb yields a subjectless transitive whose object may still even carry object case, while
impersonalisation of an intransitive yields a subjectless output. The fact that impersonals display default verbal agreement proves, in Blevins’ (2003:482) view, that there has been “no promotion to subject.” Unlike passivisation, impersonalisation is insensitive to the classes of input verbs: it can apply to nearly all classes of verbs, Blevins (2003:514–515) argues, including unaccusative intransitive and copular verbs. Impersonalisation is, however, sensitive to animacy constraints: in many Baltic and Slavic languages, Blevins observes, impersonalisation is restricted to predicates which entail human participation. Because the subject of an impersonal construction is merely suppressed, it may also still behave like a full argument in the syntax: it may bind an anaphor, for example, and it is typically associated with indefinite human interpretations. Finally, unlike the deleted subject of a passive construction, Blevins (2003:485) argues, the suppressed subject of an impersonal cannot be expressed in the form of an oblique agent phrase.

According to Blevins, one of the languages which lacks a true passive is Finnish. This claim is partly motivated by the fact that the Finnish passive affix –taan can be hosted by canonical unaccusative verbs such as kuolla ‘die’ and saapua ‘arrive’:

(21) a. Soda-ssa kuol-tiin isänmaa-n puolesta.
    war-INESS die-PASS.PAST fatherland-GEN behalf.PART
    ‘In the war it was died on behalf of the fatherland.’

b. Asema-lle saavu-ttiin hitaasti.
    station-ALLAT arrive-PASS.PAST slowly
    ‘They arrived slowly at the station.’

Such Finnish examples also display other characteristics that Blevins deems to be typical of subjectless impersonal, rather than passive, constructions. For instance, they show default agreement morphology; they are subject to animacy constraints; no agent by-phrase normally appears; and personal pronouns and partitive underlying objects retain their objective case marking after passivisation.

In section 4 we argue that a more careful examination of the Finnish data reveals a variety of features that actually support Blevins’ predictions in favour of a passive analysis. After a brief introduction to the theoretical framework, we take a closer look at passive morphosyntax (section 4.1) and input verbs (section 4.2). We then provide evidence for derived “subjects” and promotion from word order (section 4.3) and case assignment (section 4.4). Finally, we discuss agreement (section 4.5) and the presence of agent phrases (section 4.6) in Finnish; contra Blevins we argue that the “suppressed” argument is actually inert in the syntax, as one would expect from a true passive, but not from a true impersonal.
4. Arguments in favour of a Finnish passive

Within Chomsky’s (2000, 2001) minimalist program, active transitive, unergative and unaccusative constructions have the derived structures in (22) (we will revise these structures as we go along):^4

(22) a. \([\text{IP Subject}_i \ [\text{IP V}_j \ldots [\text{vP Object}_k \ [\text{vP t}_j \ t_k \ [\text{VP t}_j \ t_k]]]]\]

b. \([\text{IP Subject}_i \ [\text{IP V}_j \ldots [\text{VP t}_i \ t_j \ [\text{VP t}_j]]]]\]

c. \([\text{IP Subject}_i \ [\text{IP V}_j \ldots [\text{VP t}_j \ t_i]]]\]

In (22a) the external argument is licensed as the inner specifier of transitive v (Chomsky 2000:102–103). It is realised as the surface subject, which means that it raises from its original position to Spec,IP to check the EPP-features of I and to have its case features checked against the relevant features of I (= to get nominative case from I).^5

The internal argument is licensed as the complement of V. It is realised as the surface object, i.e. it raises to the outer Spec,vP to check the EPP-features of v and to have its case features checked (= to get accusative case) (Chomsky 2000:102–104). (22b) shows that unergative intransitives also have a vP (this is not the same vP as in the transitive construction; rather, we adopt the fairly standard view within minimalist literature that different v heads are associated with different properties). The external argument is licensed as the specifier of v and, as it is again realised as surface subject, it raises to Spec,IP for feature checking. (22c) shows that unaccusative constructions typically lack a vP: no external argument is licensed, and no accusative case assigned. The sole argument, which is licensed as the complement of V, must raise all the way up to Spec,IP, to get nominative case from I.

If Perlmutter (1978) and Blevins (2003) are right in that passivisation targets constructions licensing an external argument (a logical subject), one might be tempted to draw a parallel between passivisation and the presence/properties of the vP (i.e. only those constructions which have a vP – transitives and unergatives being a case in point – can serve as input to passivisation). One might say, for example, that passives are

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4 We take the label Inflection Phrase IP to correspond to Chomsky’s (2000, 2001) Tense Phrase (TP) and to Holmberg & Nikanne’s (2002) Finiteness Phrase (FP). Various authors, including Chomsky (1993), have labelled the same projection Subject Agreement Phrase (AgrSP). In (22), we assume that the lexical V raises to I, and that the direct object, if there is one, raises to Spec,vP. While this is true for a number of languages, including Finnish – see e.g. Manninen (2003) for discussion – there is variation between languages in movement to I and to Spec,vP.

5 The term EPP originally stood for Extended Projection Principle (i.e. this is the requirement that all sentences should have a subject; see e.g. Chomsky 1981:26–27, 1982:10). In recent generative theories the term EPP is used to explain why certain elements can be targets of movement, i.e. why they must move from their original position of merge to a specifier position of a functional head; see e.g. Chomsky (2000, 2001) for more discussion.
similar to unaccusatives (22c) in that there is no vP at all, or that there is a vP but its specifier position is unable to host an external argument – we will return to these options in section 4.1. Although we agree with Perlmutter (1978) and Blevins (2003) in that passivisation should be seen as a unified operation which prevents an argument from being licensed, we disagree with their view that it targets only the (projection hosting the) external argument/logical subject. Instead, we claim that the best way to capture data from Finnish and other languages where even unaccusative verbs are allowed to passivise is to assume that passivisation targets the (projection hosting the) highest available (human) argument. In the following, we will provide motivation for this claim.

4.1. Passive morphosyntax

As noted in section 2, an important feature of passives cross-linguistically is that they are marked as morphologically distinct from active constructions. Finnish passive verbs have a set of morphological markers in the present, past and perfect tenses. In present tense, the lexical verb is marked by the affix \(-(t)\text{ta}-/-(t)\text{ta}¨-\) followed by \(-Vn\) (an extension of the preceding vowel and a final \(n\); in section 4.5 we present arguments for analysing \(-Vn\) as an agreement affix) – see (23b) – while in the past tense, it is marked by \(-(t)\text{ti}-\) and \(-Vn\) (where the \(-i-\) indicates past tense) (24b):6

\[
\begin{align*}
(23) \text{a. } & \text{Diane tappaa etana-n.} \\
& \text{Diane.NOM kill.3SG slug-ACC} \\
& \text{‘Diane will kill the slug.’} \\
\text{b. } & \text{Etana tape-ta-an.} \\
& \text{slug.NOM kill-PASS-VN} \\
& \text{‘The slug will be killed.’}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
(24) \text{a. } & \text{Satu joi shamppanja-n.} \\
& \text{Satu.NOM drank.3SG champagne-ACC} \\
& \text{‘Satu drank the champagne.’} \\
\text{b. } & \text{Shamppanja juo-ti-in.} \\
& \text{champagne.NOM drink-PASS-PAST-VN} \\
& \text{‘The champagne was drunk. / They drank the champagne.’}
\end{align*}
\]

In the perfect tenses, the passive (25b) is formed by means of the auxiliary \(\text{olla} \) ‘be’ in the third person singular form and the lexical verb in the passive participle form; we assume that the role of \(\text{olla} \) is to carry tense

\[
6 \text{ This affix is therefore conditioned by vowel harmony and stem phonotactics, and may be realised in a variety of ways, including } -\text{taan}, -\text{da˘an}, -\text{laan}, -\text{ti˘ın}, \text{etc.}
\]
and agreement information, while the lexical verb displays passive morphology:

Diane.nom be.3sg / be.past.3sg kill-pcp slug.acc  
‘Diane has / had killed a slug.’

b. Etana on / oli tape-ttu.  
slug.nom be.3sg / be.past.3sg kill-pass.pcp  
‘The slug has / had been killed.’

In standard written Finnish, the morpheme –(t)ta-, unlike for example the Swedish –s, is not homophonous with any other morpheme: the affixes described above are unambiguously passive when attached to a verb. Even in the periphrastic construction, there is no overlap with other constructions: in the passive (26a) the participle has the same form, irrespective of the number of the element appearing in Spec,IP, while in the predicative adjective construction (26b–c) the number of this element determines the number of the participle:

(26) a. Talo / talot on maala-ttu.  
house.nom / houses.nom be.pres.3sg paint-pass.pcp  
‘The houses/houses have been painted.’

b. Talo on maala-ttu.  
house.nom be.pres.3sg paint-sg.pcp  
‘The house is painted.’

c. Talot ovat maala-tut.  
houses.nom be.pres.3pl paint-pl.pcp  
‘The houses are painted.’

But what exactly does the passive morpheme do? Many Principles-and-Parameters-based accounts, including Roberts (1987) and Baker et al. (1989), treat passive morphology as an argument which receives the theta role of the external argument. In other words, passive and active verbs have exactly the same argument structure, apart from the fact that in passive sentences the agent theta role is assigned to the passive morpheme, instead of a full phrasal argument. Secondly, because passive morphology has the form of a clitic, it ends up attached to the lexical verb (see Roberts 1987:section 2.2 and Baker et al. 1989 for the details). Finally, because passive morphology also absorbs accusative

7 In colloquial Finnish, sentences with a first person plural subject are sometimes constructed with a verb that is morphologically identical to a passive (e.g. Me juo-daam (we drink-pass) instead of Me juo-mme (we drink-1pl)). Although these forms are frequent in spoken Finnish, we will not treat them as passives because the 1pl pronominal subject is interpreted as an agent and there is no implicit (deleted) argument.

8 Vilkuna (2004) treats data like (26b–c) as examples of personal passives in Finnish. This means that promotion to subject (i.e. movement to Spec,IP) has occurred, and the raised XP triggers agreement on the verb (i.e. on the lexical V which has raised to I).
case, the underlying direct object must raise to the surface subject position Spec,IP to get nominative case from I (Roberts 1987:section 2.2, Baker et al. 1989).

Unlike Perlmutter (1978) and Blevins (2003), Baker et al. (1989) do not restrict passivisation to constructions licensing an external argument. Instead, they assume languages to vary with regard to the positions where passive morphology may be generated and the theta roles it may be assigned: in languages like German and Dutch which allow transitives and unergative intransitives to passivise, for example, the morphology is generated in the external argument position, whereas in languages which allow even unaccusatives to passivise, it may be generated even inside the VP. The position where passive morphology is generated then determines the theta role it is assigned (e.g. agent or patient/theme).

Within minimalist approaches, passives are often taken to be structurally similar to unaccusatives, in the sense that neither construction has a vP hosting an external argument and responsible for the assignment of accusative case. In the unaccusative (22c), we have seen, the sole argument is merged as the complement of V: it then raises to the surface subject position Spec,IP to check the EPP feature of I and to have its case features checked against the relevant features of I (= to get nominative case from I). In a passive construction, the sole argument is also merged as the complement of V, and raises to Spec,IP for feature checking purposes. In morphological passives, the lexical V raises to I, and in periphrastic ones, the auxiliary raises to I while the participial lexical V raises to the head of a lower functional projection (Participial Phrase, Voice Phrase, or something else; see e.g. Holmberg et al. 1993, Koskinen 1998, Nelson 1998, Cinque 1999, Manninen 2003 for discussion of the lower functional domain).

However, the idea that passives are structurally similar to unaccusatives is problematic for Finnish. As it assumes that only constructions which contain a vP projection, i.e. transitives and unergative intransitives, may serve as input to passivisation. The situation may be improved by assuming, in line with Manninen (2003) and the references cited therein, that all constructions, including unaccusative ones, contain a vP but that the v heads are associated with different properties (or, rather, with different feature specifications). In transitive and unergative constructions (27a–b), the v is associated with transitivity and/or agentivity and has a selectional feature for an agent argument, while in unaccusatives (27c), the v is associated with eventiveness and has a selectional feature for a patient/theme argument (i.e. even though (27b) and (27c) may look identical, their v heads are different and hence the arguments in Spec,vP are associated with different theta roles). What we have labelled V may then be a “root” which carries the basic semantics
but does not itself select any arguments, in the sense of e.g. Marantz (1997):

(27) a. [IP Subjecti [IP V_j... [vP Object_k [vP t_i t_j [vP t_k t_j [VP t_j ]]]]]]
b. [IP Subjecti [IP V_j... [vP t_i t_j [VP t_j ]]]]
c. [IP Subject_k [IP V_j... [vP t_k t_j [VP t_j ]]]]

In order to account for the active-passive distinction, we propose that the highest v in each construction is provided with a voice feature (i.e. a feature which is added to the v when it is merged with the syntactic tree; this proposal is an extension of earlier systems where a voice feature was attributed to a separate functional Voice head located on top of the VP-domain – see e.g. Kratzer 1994, 1996 for such systems). Voice can be instantiated as one of two values: [active] and [passive]. [Active] is the default as it results in no overt morphology and the selectional properties of v are not affected: a transitive/agentive v can still license an agent argument in its specifier position, for example. [passive] is the marked value, in the sense that it corresponds to distinct morphology in the phonetic form (i.e. in languages like Finnish, the passive morpheme is an overt realisation of the voice feature – i.e. of the marked value [passive] – on the highest v). It also affects the selectional properties of v, in that it prevents an argument from being licensed in its specifier position. In passives of transitives and unergatives, where the highest v is associated with transitivity and/or agentivity, the argument that fails to be licensed is an agent (Blevins’ logical subject), whereas in passives of unaccusatives, where the highest v is associated with eventiveness, the argument that fails to be licensed is a patient/theme (Blevins’ logical object). Note that we assume [passive] to only affect the selectional properties of v: the heads still retain their other properties, including their basic semantics. This may explain why passivised transitives still license various kinds of agent-oriented adverbials, for example:9

(28) The slugs were killed deliberately / intentionally / on purpose.

In the discussion so far, we have assumed that the highest v in each construction is provided with a voice feature. However, although all v heads are compatible with the default value, languages differ with regard to the types of v heads that are compatible with the marked value: in English, where only transitives may passivise, the marked value [passive] is compatible with just transitive v heads. In German and Dutch, where transitives and unergatives may passivise, the marked value [passive] is compatible with transitive and agentive v

9 We thank the anonymous reviewer for raising this issue. Even Svenonius (2002) has proposed that in passive constructions, the existence of an (external) argument is “implied” by the presence of the v head, but that it cannot be overtly expressed.
heads. In Finnish, where nearly all verbs may passivise, the marked value [passive] is compatible with nearly all v heads. The line of reasoning pursued here may then be seen as an extension of Baker et al.’s (1989) proposal, see also Svenonius (2002), that different languages allow passive morphology to be associated with different structural positions.

Summarising the main proposal, then, we assume passivisation to equal the presence of a voice feature (i.e. a marked value [passive]) on the highest possible v head. A v head which is [passive] cannot license an argument in its Spec,vP position, although it still retains its other properties, including its basic semantics. The inability to license an argument in the highest Spec,vP position is what creates the effect of argument “demotion” or “deletion” discussed in e.g. Comrie (1977), Perlmutter (1978) and Blevins (2003). Unlike the previous analyses, the line of reasoning proposed here results in a uniform analysis for passives created from different classes of input verbs (transitive, unergative and unaccusative). After a discussion of input verbs and animacy in section 4.2, we will show that the Finnish construction also displays “promotion” to subject in section 4.3.

4.2. Productivity and animacy

Above, we defined passivisation as an operation which targets the highest available v, and prevents an argument from being licensed in its Spec,vP position. Data as in (29) suggest that in Finnish, passivisation specifically prevents a human argument from being licensed in this position. (29a) is an example of a passive of a copular verb, while (29b) and (29c) show that both agentive and non-agentive intransitives, including canonical unaccusatives like to die, may undergo passivisation so long as they entail human participation:

(29) a. Kotona ol-laan nyt tosi ilois-ia.
   home.ess be-pass now totally happy-pl.part
   ‘At home everyone is totally happy now.’
   (Iltalehti, 30.8.2002)

b. Illa-lla laule-ttiin.
   evening-adess sing-pass.past
   ‘In the evening it was sung.’

c. Soda-ssa kuol-tiin isänmaa-n puolesta.
   war-iness die-pass.past fatherland-gen behalf.part
   ‘In the war it was died on behalf of the fatherland.’

However, there are still quite a few verbs in Finnish which resist passivisation (with or without a sentence-initial XP). These include verbs denoting natural forces and processes (i.e. weather verbs as in (30b)): 
The fact that verbs such as *sataa ‘rain’ resist passivisation is unsurprising, since they are normally assumed to be zero-place predicates which have no arguments available for deletion. If passivisation is an operation which prevents the highest argument of each predicate from being licensed, then the line of analysis developed here correctly predicts the ill-formedness of (30b).

Another class of verbs which resist passivisation in Finnish may be broadly categorised as dyadic unaccusative predicates (which almost always denote states rather than events). These include causative Object Experiencer psych verbs such as *harmittaa ‘to annoy’ (31a); other non-agentive predicates such as *sisälťää ‘to contain’ (31b); and certain modals such as täytyy ‘must’ and sopii ‘to be okay’ (31c) (Löflund 1998:44–60):

We suggest that these verbs resist passivisation for a variety of reasons specific to verbal semantics. Firstly, causative psych verbs are not ungrammatical in the passive in Finnish, but semantically very odd: the interpretation of a sentence like (31a) suggests that the implicit causer is not actually responsible for the emotional state of the experiencer. Pylkkänen (1999a) and Nelson (2003) argue that these verbs are dyadic unaccusatives in Finnish, selecting experiencer and theme internal arguments along the lines of Belletti & Rizzi (1988), and in this respect they pattern like verbs in the Italian piacere class. Unusually, these verbs are stative but display overt causative morphology. Pylkkänen (1999b) presents cross-linguistic evidence to show that, although causative morphology (via a causative functional head; alternatively, we could be dealing with a causative feature on a v head) introduces causative verbal semantics and therefore a sense of causation, this class of verbs fails to license a causer argument.
According to this analysis, stative verbs such as *harmittaa* ‘to annoy’ in the active license two internal arguments, an experiencer and a theme, but no external causer role; instead, the theme is construed as a non-agentive stimulus that triggers an emotion as long as it is perceived by the experiencer.\(^{10}\) As outlined above, passivisation blocks the ability of an unaccusative/eventive *v* to license an argument (a patient or theme). If passivisation deletes the highest available human argument in the input, the theme, by preventing it from being licensed, then this argument is implicit but there is still no causer role in the semantics. The oddness of examples like (31a) is due to the fact that the implicit theme is interpreted as necessarily human but is not identified with the causative semantics encoded in the *v* head. In this way passivisation, stative aspect and causation all interact to yield a semantically anomalous predicate.

The other verbs in (31) resist passivisation for other reasons. Verbs of physical containment like *sisältää* ‘contain’ in (31b) are difficult to conceptualise in the passive if a human participant is entailed; these verbs are ruled out for similar reasons as weather verbs. Finally, modals like *täytyy* ‘must’ in (31c) may be seen as semantic operators which license a proposition, rather than a human argument. This is reflected in the syntax, as *täytyy* belongs to a class of modals, including *tarvitse* ‘need’ and *pitää* ‘need’, which license a genitive rather than a nominative subject. This apparently syntactic constraint holds for a relatively small number of verbs (Vilkuna 1989), but may ultimately derive from the semantics. Further research is needed to clarify the properties of non-nominative subject verbs in Finnish. The constraints on dyadic input verbs, then, are due to a heterogenous collection of mainly semantic factors.

The data presented in this section suggest that an important criterion for passivisation in Finnish is potential human (or at least highly personified animal) participation. Depending on the context, the implicit argument in a Finnish passive may be interpreted as either human or highly personified animal, and either plural or singular, and having varying degrees of specificity. According to Siewierska (1984:96) high animacy is a common feature of impersonal passives cross-linguistically. This contrasts with true impersonal constructions (32a) and the middle/reflexive formed with the affix –*utu*/–*yty* (33a). The data in (32b) and (33b) show that passives entail unspecified human participation, even when no such participant is present in the argument structure of the active form:

---

\(^{10}\) In contrast, Nelson (2003) shows that non-stative psych predicates with causative morphology do license a Causer role, so these verbs passivise freely because the deleted argument is the Causer. Non-causative stative psych verbs such as *rakastaa* ‘to love’ also form perfectly good passives.
(32) a. Laboratorio-ssa räjähti usein.
   laboratory-INESS exploded.3SG often
   ‘There were often explosions in the laboratory.’
   (i.e. some inanimate things exploded or caused an explosion)

   b. Laboratorio-ssa räjähde-ttiin usein.
   laboratory-INESS explode-PASS.PAST often
   ‘There were often explosions in the laboratory.’
   (i.e. some people working in the laboratory exploded)

(33) a. Talo tuho-utu-i (myrsky-ssa ¨ ) / (itsekseen).
   house.NOM destroy-REFL-PAST.3SG (storm-INESS) / by itself
   ‘The house was destroyed (in a storm) / (by itself).’

   b. Talo tuho-ttiin (??myrsky-ssa ¨ ) / (*itsekseen).
   house.NOM destroy-PASS.PAST (storm-INESS) / (by itself)
   ‘The house was destroyed (??in a storm) / (*by itself).’

Interestingly, this is not predicted by Blevins (2003), who links animacy constraints with Balto-Finnic “impersonals” (our passives) but also argues that true passives are insensitive to animacy constraints and do not entail human participation. Yet examples like (33a) meet various criteria for impersonals, including 3SG agreement morphology, no option for a by-phrase and the ability to bind an anaphor (see section 4.7). This suggests that the animacy criterion does not always function as a valid test for distinguishing between passives and (non-passive) impersonals.

4.3. Derived subjects

In section 3 we have seen how Shore (1986, 1988) and Blevins (2003) reject a passive analysis for Finnish on the grounds that passivisation does not involve promotion to subject (or, in our terminology, movement to Spec,IP). In this section we argue that the sentence-initial XPs in data like (1b), (2b) and (17b–c) are in Spec,IP. We begin by discussing movement to Spec,IP in active constructions and by distinguishing between subject- and topic-prominent languages. We then apply the system to Finnish passive constructions.

4.3.1. Movement to Spec,IP

Within the minimalist framework of Chomsky (2000, 2001) movement is driven by the need to check uninterpretable features, including the case features of DPs and the EPP features of functional I and v heads. In active transitive constructions, the external argument moves to Spec,IP, the internal argument to Spec,vP. In unergatives and unaccusatives, the only argument moves to Spec,IP and is assigned nominative case by I.

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However, languages differ with regard to the types of elements they allow in their Spec,IP position. Holmberg & Nikanne (2002), following E. Kiss (1995, 1997), distinguish between subject- and topic-prominent languages. In subject-prominent languages (e.g. English) the moving element is “the subject in the sense of the thematically highest argument,” while in topic-prominent languages (e.g. Hungarian, Finnish) it “need not be the subject but can be any category capable of functioning as a topic” (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002:78). Topic in Holmberg & Nikanne’s system is the element containing given information, while elements capable of functioning as topics must be referential “in the broad sense, including locative and temporal adverbials” (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002:81).

Whether a language is subject- or topic-prominent has consequences for word order. Because in subject-prominent languages the moving element must be the subject in the sense of the thematically highest argument, movement of a non-subject will result in ill-formedness: the English (34b) is out if the lecturer is the entity getting eaten. But because in topic-prominent languages the Spec,IP position can be filled by any category capable of functioning as a topic, the Finnish (35a) and (35b) are equally well-formed and only differ in terms of information structure:11

(34)  a. The shark ate the lecturer.
    b. *The lecturer ate the shark.

    shark. NOM ate. 3SG lecturer. ACC
    ‘The shark ate a/the lecturer.’
    b. Lehtorin sōi hai.
    lecturer. ACC ate. 3SG shark. NOM
    ‘It was a shark that ate the lecturer.’

Instead of just case features, Holmberg & Nikanne (2002:79–81) argue that movement to Spec,IP in topic-prominent languages is determined by the presence of the feature [+Focus] on the moving XP: an XP that is [+Focus] is interpreted as the information focus (new information), while an XP that is [–Focus] is part of the presupposition (given information). Because [–Focus] is an uninterpretable feature, it needs checking against the features of an appropriate functional head. Holmberg & Nikanne (2002:79) take this head to be I: they propose

11 Holmberg & Nikanne (2002:86–89) show that the sentence-initial XPs in data like (35a) and (35b) do appear in the same structural positions. They also show why only the former XP triggers full person and number agreement on the finite verb. For details, the reader is referred to the literature.
that the XP in question raises to Spec,IP to satisfy the EPP property of I and to have its [+Focus] feature checked against the relevant feature of I. Crucially, the Spec,IP position in a subject-prominent language is the grammatical subject position, while in a topic-prominent language it is first and foremost a topic position containing the old or given information in the sentence.

The idea that the EPP of I requires merge of an XP in the Finnish Spec,IP position may seem contradictory to the fact that Finnish allows verb-initial sentences. However, as observed by e.g. Välimaa-Blum (1988:78–79), Vilkuna (1995:250) and Kaiser (2004), verb-initial sentences are usually heavily marked in this language and emphasize the assertion made by the sentence. This suggests that the lexical verb has moved across Spec,IP to some higher position in the CP-domain (e.g. to C or the head of a contrastive phrase located in between C and IP – see e.g. Koskinen 1998, Vallduvı´ & Vilkuna 1998 and Kaiser 2004 for such structures). Holmberg & Nikanne (2002:82–83) observe that a verb-initial sentence can be focus-neutral only when it has no potential topic. For example, because (36a) asserts the coming into existence of a phenomenon, it does not allow presuppositional readings: the only argument must be [+Focus] and so cannot raise to Spec,IP:12

(36) a. Sattui onnettomuus.
    occurred.3SG accident.NOM
    ‘There occurred an accident.’


According to Holmberg & Nikanne (2002:82–83) only one XP can be [+Focus] while all others are [–Focus]. This means that, if an example like (36a) contains an additional argument or adverbial, this must be [–Focus] (i.e. given information) and raise to Spec,IP. Holmberg & Nikanne’s claim receives support from the well-formedness of (37a) and ill-formedness of (37b) (with a focus-neutral reading).13

12 Holmberg & Nikanne (2002:83) propose that in constructions like (36a) which lack a potential topic the functional I head may be merged without an EPP feature – this is why there is no violation of EPP.

13 Although a number of elements can be [–Focus] at the same time, only one of them can be the topic and raise overtly to Spec,IP. The others can then have their features checked via covert movement or via long-distance agreement (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002 do not discuss situations where more than one element is [–Focus]). The fact that (37b) is ill-formed with a focus-neutral reading but well-formed with a contrastive one (e.g., it could be uttered in a situation where Speaker A has just claimed that I did not have an accident and I wish to deny this) supports the idea that verb-initial sentences involve movement of the verb across the Spec,IP to some higher position in the CP-domain. Because we are only interested in the focus-neutral readings in this paper, we will treat constructions like (37b) as simply ill-formed.
In constructions which allow presuppositional readings, the only argument is necessarily [–Focus] (i.e. given information) and raises to Spec,IP:

(38) a. Diane nauroi.
    Diane,NOM laughed,3SG
    ‘Diane laughed.’

b. *Nauroi Diane.

(39) a. Etana kuoli.
    slug,NOM died,3SG
    ‘The slug died.’

b. *Kuoli etana.

When constructions as in (38) and (39) also contain adverbial phrases, the distribution of [±Focus] is determined by the distribution of given and new information. In (40a), Diane is given information, while the fact that she laughed in the sauna is new information. In (40b), the identity of the person laughing in the sauna is new information, while the existence of the sauna and the fact that someone was laughing there are presupposed. The ill-formedness of (40c) (with focus-neutral reading) is again explained by one of the XPs having an unchecked [–Focus] feature and I having an unchecked EPP-feature. The same pattern is illustrated for unaccusative verbs like kuolla ‘die’ in (41):\(^{14}\)

(40) a. Diane nauroi sauna-ssa.
    Diane,NOM laughed,3SG sauna-INESS
    ‘Diane was laughing in the sauna.’

b. Sauna-ssa nauroi Diane.
    sauna-INESS laughed,3SG Diane,NOM
    ‘The person laughing in the sauna was Diane.’

c. *Nauroi Diane saunassa.

---

\(^{14}\) Recall that only constructions which do not allow presuppositional readings can contain a functional I which is merged without an EPP feature. As both (40) and (41) do allow presuppositional readings, their functional I heads are merged with an EPP feature which must be then satisfied by merge of an XP in Spec,IP.

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What is a passive? The case of Finnish  237

(41) a. Etana kuoli puutarha-ssa.
   slug.nom died.3sg garden-INESS
   ‘The slug died in the garden.’

b. Puutarha-ssa kuoli etana.
   garden-INESS died.3sg slug.nom
   ‘A slug died in the garden.’

c. *Kuoli etana puutarhassa.

After this brief outline, we move on to show how the system can account for our passive data.

4.3.2. Passives

Above, we have seen that the Finnish Spec,IP hosts a topic and that any referential XP – including patients and locative and temporal adverbials – is a potential topic. We now argue this to be true of both active and passive constructions. And given that in passives one of the “real” arguments is demoted/deleted (i.e. cannot be licensed in the relevant Spec,vP), the line of reasoning pursued here correctly predicts that the Spec,IP should be frequently filled by patients and by locative and temporal adverbials (= promotion). The verb-initial passives discussed in Shore (1986, 1988) are not a problem for our analysis because – just like active verb-initial constructions – they are usually only possible under special circumstances: the word order may be used to create a contrastive effect, or the sentence may have a special pragmatic function. These functions include the specific use (i.e. reference to some specific group of people which includes the speaker) and the imperative use. For example, (42a) may be uttered by a member in a group that is preparing to go on a slug-killing frenzy or by someone who is ordering others to go on such a frenzy – the “proper” imperative forms are given in (42b–c). The same pattern is illustrated for unergative and unaccusative intransitives in (43):

(42) a. Tape-taan etanoi-ta!
   kill-pass slugs-part
   ‘Let’s kill slugs!’
   ‘Kill slugs!’

b. Tappa-kaa-mme etanoi-ta!
   kill-imp-1pl slugs-part
   ‘Let’s kill slugs!’

c. Tappa-kaa etanoi-ta!
   kill-imp.2pl slugs-part
   ‘Kill slugs!’

(43) a. Laule-taan! Kuol-laan!
   sing-pass die-pass
   ‘Let’s sing!’ / ‘Sing!’ ‘Let’s die!’ / ‘Die!’
b. Laula-kaa-mme! Kuol-kaa-mme!
sing-IMP-1PL die-IMP-1PL
‘Let’s sing!’ ‘Let’s die!’
c. Laula-kaa! Kuol-kaa!
sing-IMP.2PL die-IMP.2PL
‘Sing!’ ‘Die!’

Just like in the active, movement to Spec,IP in Finnish passives is determined by the feature [±Focus] and the distribution of given and new information. In both active and passive constructions, the moving element may be any XP as long as that XP is referential and capable of functioning as a topic. In (44a), champagne is the topic (given information, hence [−Focus]) while the fact that it was drunk at a/the party is the information focus (new information, [+Focus]). (44b) is equally well-formed but the distribution of given and new information is reversed. (44c) is ill-formed (with a focus-neutral reading) because the construction still contains unchecked features:

(44) a. Shampanja-a juo-tiin juhli-ssa.
   champagne-PART drink-PASS.PAST party-INESS
   ‘Champagne was drunk at a/the party.’
   party-INESS drink-PASS.PAST champagne-PART
   ‘At the party, champagne was drunk.’
c. *Juotiin shampanjaa juhlissa.

Our claim that the sentence-initial XPs in (44a–b) are in Spec,IP is supported by a number of facts. First, just like subject-topics of active constructions (45a–b), these XPs stand in between the complementiser että ‘that’ in C and the finite verb in I (see 45c–f). This rules out the possibility of the XPs being in Spec,CP or a position higher than Spec,CP:

(45) a. Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP Diane [IP tappoi etanoita]]].
   Satu said that Diane killed slugs
b. *Satu sanoi, Diane että tappoi etanoita.
c. Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP etanoita [IP tapetaan puutarhassa]]].
   Satu said that slugs are killed in the garden
d. *Satu sanoi, etanoita että tapetaan puutarhassa.
e. Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP puutarhassa [IP tapetaan etanoita]]].
   Satu said that in the garden are killed slugs
f. *Satu sanoi, puutarhassa että tapetaan etanoita.

Secondly, if the sentence-initial XPs in (44a–b) were in between C and Spec,IP we would expect them to co-occur with overt material in
Spec,IP. The active constructions in (46) show that such situations do arise – we have labelled the projection in between C and Spec,IP here simply ZP:

(46) a. Satu sanoi, \( [\text{CP} \textit{etta} [\text{ZP} \textit{etanoita} [\text{IP} \textit{Diane tappoi puutarhassa}]]] \).
    ‘Situ said that slugs Diane killed in the garden.’

b. Satu sanoi, \( [\text{CP} \textit{etta} [\text{ZP} \textit{puutarhassa} [\text{IP} \textit{Diane tappoi etanoita}]]] \).
    ‘Situ said that it was slugs that Diane killed in the garden.’

But elements in between C and Spec,IP are always interpreted contrastively in Finnish: (46a) for example can be uttered in a situation where speaker A has claimed that Diane killed ants in the garden and speaker B wants to correct him. So, if the sentence-initial XPs in the passive (44a–b) were in a position between C and Spec,IP, we would expect them to receive a contrastive interpretation – but this clearly is not what happens.

Thirdly, the possibility of the sentence-initial XPs in (44a–b) appearing lower down than the head of I is ruled out by the fact that (44c) cannot receive a focus-neutral reading. A number of authors (e.g. Mitchell 1992, Holmberg et al. 1993, Koskinen 1998, Nelson 1998, Holmberg & Nikanne 2002, Manninen 2003) have shown that in Finnish, finite verbs raise to I. If the sentence-initial verb was in its normal position in (44c), we would expect the sentence to receive a focus-neutral interpretation (in the same way e.g. (36a) does): the fact that (44c) is well-formed only when it receives a contrastive interpretation suggests that the verb has raised to the head of a contrastive phrase (such as ZP in our (46)) located in between C and Spec,IP.

Fourthly, in coordination the shared argument must appear in the same structural position. It is not possible to coordinate constituents that are in the specifiers of IP and a contrastive phrase (such as ZP in our (46)), for example:

(47) *Dianea naurattaa ja Satu kutittaa.
    ‘Diane feels like laughing and Satu tickles.’ (i.e. it is Diane that Satu tickles)

(48) show that subjects of active constructions, which are uncontroversially in Spec,IP, can be coordinated with sentence-initial XPs in passives:

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To conclude, there is sufficient evidence indicating that not only demotion/deletion (i.e. the inability to license an argument in Spec,vP) but also promotion (i.e. movement to Spec,IP) occurs in Finnish passives, and that this latter process is subsumed by a general requirement that the Spec,IP position be filled by a phonetically overt XP bearing the discourse function of a topic. Besides arguments, many non-arguments can function as topics, which explains the fact that locative or temporal adverbials are frequently found in the Finnish Spec,IP.

4.4. Evidence from case

In English and many other languages, promotion in passives is associated with case alternations: underlying direct objects in accusative case resurface as nominative derived subjects in passives:

(49) a. Sam kissed her.
    b. She was kissed (by Sam).

Case may therefore be seen as evidence for promotion of derived subjects in passives. In Finnish, the situation is complicated by the mixed syntactico-semantic properties of the case system. As has been discussed extensively in the literature (e.g. Heinämaäki 1984, Kiparsky 1998, Nelson 1998), the case of the direct object is conditioned by both aspectual semantics at the VP-level and by DP-semantics, including definiteness and quantizedness:

(50) a. Diane sōi kakku-a.
    Diane.NOM ate.3SG cake-PART
    ‘Diane ate some cake.’ / ‘Diane was eating some cake.’ / ‘Diane was (in the process of) eating the whole cake.’
    b. Diane sōi kaku-n.
    Diane.NOM ate.3SG cake-ACC
    ‘Diane ate the (whole) cake.’

In (50a), the partitive object yields an interpretation where either the event, the DP, or both are unbounded; either the eating event or the cake
must be interpreted as partial in some sense. In (50b), accusative case signals that the event is interpreted as bounded, and the entire cake is eaten. See Kiparsky (1998) for a formalisation of the event and DP semantics involved in this alternation.

In Finnish passives, some underlying direct objects “promote” to nominative, while others retain their objective case marking. Specifically, full DPs which are underlyingly accusative undergo the expected case alternation from accusative to nominative:

(51) a. Pekka murhasi Jussi-n.
   Pekka.NOM murdered.3SG Jussi-ACC
   ‘Pekka murdered Jussi.’

   b. Jussi murha-ttiin.
   Jussi.NOM murder-PASS.PAST
   ‘Jussi was murdered.’

Exceptions to this pattern fall into two classes. Underlyingly accusative human pronouns remain in accusative case in standard Finnish passives (in some dialects even they become nominative; see e.g. Lehtinen 1985):

(52) a. Pekka murhasi häne-t.
   Pekka.NOM murdered.3SG s/he-ACC
   ‘Pekka murdered him/her.’

   b. Häne-t murha-ttiin.
   s/he-ACC murder-PASS.PAST
   ‘S/he was murdered.’

In addition, all non-accusative underlying objects retain their original case marking after passivisation. This includes partitive objects (53) as well as those in elative and other oblique cases (54): 15

(53) a. Diane tappoi etanoi-ta.
   Diane.NOM killed.3SG slugs-PART
   ‘Diane killed slugs.’

   b. Etanoi-ta tape-ttiin.
   slugs-PART kill-PASS.PAST
   ‘Some slugs were killed.’

(54) a. Diane pitää Satu-sta.
   Diane.NOM likes.3s Satu-ELA
   ‘Diane likes Satu.’

   b. Satu-sta pide-täään.
   Satu-ELA like-PASS
   ‘Satu is liked.’

15 We thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding us of these facts with this example.
These kinds of examples have been used as evidence that Finnish lacks a true passive construction (e.g. Vainikka 1989, Blevins 2003). However, there are compelling reasons for rejecting such a view. Firstly, the fact that elatives and partitives are unaffected by passivisation is unsurprising: in many Indo-European languages, inherently case-marked arguments retain their case under passivisation:

(55) Ihm wird geholfen. German
    him.DAT is helped
    ‘He is helped.’

Like the German dative and similar Indo-European cases, the Finnish elative (and other oblique cases e.g. illative) are closely associated with verbal semantics and are lexically assigned by many verbs; therefore it might be predicted that these cases behave in a similar fashion under passivisation. However, there are significant differences between Indo-European inherent cases and the Finnish partitive: the partitive occurs freely with verbs of nearly all classes, and is not associated with a particular thematic role or position. Unlike so-called quirky cases, its distribution as an alternate object case to the accusative is predictable and conditioned by semantics. Even if the partitive is taken to be structural, rather than inherent, it is significant to note that an underlying partitive in Finnish never surfaces as nominative in syntactic environments where this may be expected to occur. In contrast, the accusative does alternate with nominative across a range of sentence types, which may be characterised as those with lack both full agreement and an external argument (Vainikka 1989, Nelson 1998). These environments include imperatives (56a) and objects of certain modal predicates (56b) as well as passives:

(56) a. Tuo se / sitä!
    bring.imp it.NOM / it.PART
    ‘Bring it!’

b. Minu-n pitää ostaa olut / olutta.
    I-gen need.3sg to-buy beer.NOM / beer.PART
    ‘I need to buy a beer/ some beer.’

Passives, then, are simply another morphosyntactic environment in which underlying accusative objects “passivise” but partitives do not. Within the wider context of the Finnish case system, then, it would in

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16 There is some debate in the literature as to whether the Finnish partitive is structural or inherent. Analyses within Principles & Parameters have argued that it is a structural case assigned at D-structure (Vainikka & Maling 1996, Nelson 1998).

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fact be surprising if DPs carrying partitive semantics did surface as nominative in passives.

The retention of accusative case on Finnish personal pronouns in passives requires a different type of analysis. This pattern can be explained as an ergative (or more precisely, active) split within the Finnish case system; crosslinguistically, certain classes of arguments may be case-marked like objects in subject-case environments, depending on features like animacy. An explanation along these lines has been proposed by e.g. Kiparsky (1998) and Nelson (1998); Moravcsik (1978) and Itkonen (1979) have also suggested that the Finnish case system is partially ergative.

To conclude, we take the accusative-nominative alternation for full DPs to be strong evidence for promotion. The fact that human pronouns and partitives do not “passivise” is not a problem for our analysis when viewed from a cross-linguistic perspective.

4.5. Agreement

As mentioned in section 3, one of the main arguments in the literature against the Finnish passive is the apparent lack of verbal agreement in this construction (Shore 1986, 1988; Blevins 2003):

(57) a. Etana/etana-t tape-ttiin.
   slug.nom/slugs.nom kill-pass.past
   ‘The slug was killed.’
   b. Sinu-t/teidâ-t tape-ttiin.
   you-sg.acc/you-pl.acc kill-pass.past
   ‘You were killed.’

(57) show that the surface morphology of the passive remains unchanged regardless of whether the derived subject is singular or plural, or a personal pronoun. While this pattern diverges from standard Indo-European personal passives, cross-linguistic studies note that many languages have passives which fail to show agreement with a surface subject (e.g. Siewierska 1984, Keenan 1985). We argue, firstly, that within the context of Finnish morphosyntax a lack of agreement in this syntactic environment is not unusual. Secondly, we present both diachronic and synchronic evidence that Finnish passive verbs display richer agreement morphology than previously assumed.

Finnish has a number of other constructions where the element in the surface subject position Spec,IP fails to trigger person and number agreement on the finite verb in I (e.g. Hakulinen & Karlsson 1979: 158–166; Vilkuna 1996:134–138) – some examples are given in (58). In this regard, passive constructions are in no way exceptional:
   foot-PART-my / feet-PART-my hurt.3SG
   ‘My foot is / my feet are hurting.’

b. Minua / Meitä naurattaa.
   I.PART / we.PART feel.like.laughing.3SG
   ‘I / we feel like laughing.’

c. Lintu / Lintuj-a istui aida-lla.
   bird.NOM / birds-PART sat.3SG fence-ADESS
   ‘The bird was / Birds were sitting on the fence.’

d. Poja-n / poiki-en täytyy laulaa.
   boy-GEN / boys-GEN must.3SG sing.INF
   ‘The boy/boys must sing.’

(58a) and (58b) are examples of experiencer constructions with partitive subjects, where the verb shows default third person agreement morphology regardless of the person and number features of the subject. In (58c), a plural partitive subject again fails to trigger agreement on the verb. In (58d), the modal verb täytyy remains invariably in third person singular and licenses a genitive subject. While these are not canonical subjects, they pass various tests for subjecthood (see Hakulinen & Karlsson 1979:163–166, Vilkuna 1989) and may be classified as quirky subjects. The fact that Finnish allows default-agreeing subjects throughout the grammar weakens the agreement argument against a passive analysis.

However, in contrast to the above examples, passive subjects are atypical in that they may appear in nominative case and still fail to trigger agreement. As discussed in section 4.4, nominative DPs without full verbal agreement occur in a range of constructions (imperatives, modal constructions, and others) characterised by lack of an external argument. The current analysis is consistent with Nelson’s (1998) proposal that nominative arguments in these environments originate VP-internally but must check case in Spec,IP, i.e. are effectively syntactic subjects. For other analyses, see for example Vainikka (1989).

There is actually plenty of diachronic evidence that Finnish passives once agreed with derived subjects. In traditional Finnish grammars, the passive marker –taan is argued to have originated as a passive stem –ta- plus a third person possessive agreement affix, -an (e.g. Hakulinen 1946/1961:157, Kettunen & Vaula 1956). This supports the idea that synchronically, Finnish has passives marked with third person default

17 Hakulinen (1946/1961:157) proposes a reflexive origin for the Finnish passive: “In the finite form of the passive the ‘personal ending’ consists of vowel-lengthening + -n, which has developed from the earlier form *-hen and is of common origin with the 3rd person singular ending of the dialectal reflexive conjugation […] and with the 3rd person possessive suffix in the form of vowel lengthening.”
agreement. A number of sources, including Löflund (1998:13–16), have observed that old Finnish literature contains examples of passives where first, second, and third person subjects trigger overt agreement on the finite verb:

(59) a. …me temma-ta-mme…
we grab-PASS-1PL
‘we will be grabbed’

b. …te caste-ta-t…
you baptise-PASS-2PL
‘you will be baptised’

Ojansuu (1909:103)

Hakulinen (1946/1961:157) takes examples like these as evidence that the current third person default agreement must derive originally from a much richer agreement paradigm.

Interestingly, synchronic evidence suggests that a richer agreement paradigm is still present in the grammar. Present-day Finnish offers copious examples of (partial) number agreement between nominative plural subjects and passive participle constructions. These are usually rejected by grammarians as “hypercorrect” forms (e.g. Karlsson 1977; cf. Vilkuna 2004):

(60) a. Kaikki frakit oli-vat vuokra-ttu.
all tuxedos.NOM be.PAST-3PL rented-PCP
‘All the tuxedos were rented.’

b. Ensi kauden F1-tallipaikat ovat käytännössä
next season’s F1-positions.NOM be.3PL practice.INESS
lyö-ty lukkoon.
hit.PCP lock.ILLAT
‘In practice all of next season’s Formula 1 positions have already been filled.’

(Iltalehti 30.8. 2002)

Despite prescriptive pressure against their use, these forms are frequent in modern Finnish. We take examples like (60a–b) as further evidence for passivisation in Finnish.

4.6. Agent by-phrases

Both Blevins (2003) and Shore (1986, 1988) mention specified agent phrases as an important criterion for passivisation. This is particularly relevant for Blevins’ analysis of passives, which includes a generalised demotion operation; agent phrases therefore represent the only possible surface realisation of the demoted/deleted argument. According to this
line of reasoning, if an specified agent phrase is possible in a construction with a demoted/deleted logical subject, then the construction should be classified as a passive. Despite Shore’s claims that the Finnish construction disallows an agent phrase, examples of agentive adjuncts with passives are in fact very common in Finnish texts. By-phrases are formed with *toimesta* ‘on the part of’ and resemble similar expressions in other Balto-Finnic languages (see e.g. Hiietam & Manninen 2004):

(61) a. Vaasan Asevelikylä rakenne-ttiin
   Vaasa genie veteran.village nom build-pass.past
   war.veterans.gen part. elat years ess 1946–55
   ‘The Vaasa veteran village was built 1946–55 by war veterans.’
   (http://www.edu.vaasa.fi/asaa/rakennettiin.html)

b. Leirini tuho-taan 3714:ssä Azaghalin
   camp nom my destroy-pass 3741 iness Azaghal gen
   toimesta.
   part elat
   ‘My camp is destroyed in position 3714 by Azaghal.’
   (http://www.students.tut.fi/~jolaakso/pbm/p7/p7vuorot25.htm)

In (61a) it is clear from the context that the war veterans are also the builders (instead of just initiating the process), while in (61b) Azaghal is the actual destroyer (instead of his troops).

While by-phrases are not considered by typologists to be a key criterion for passivisation cross-linguistically, in languages where they are licensed they are associated with both personal and impersonal passives (Siewierska 1984). The *toimesta*-phrases in (61) identify a [+animate, +human] agent; (61b) in particular shows that the agent may refer to a singular, specific human individual (a person named Azaghal). In both (61a) and (61b), the only possible referent for the *toimesta*-phrases is the demoted/deleted logical subject of the passive. We take this to be strong evidence for a passive analysis for Finnish. This also shows that passivisation in Finnish involves a demotion/deletion process as well as promotion.

4.7. Anaphoric binding

As noted in section 3, one of Blevins’ (2003) central arguments about the contrast between passives and impersonals is that passivisation demotes/deletes the input logical subject while impersonalisation merely suppresses it from phonological realisation. In other words, impersonals still contain an underlying subject/agent in the syntax. One test for the
syntactic status of implicit arguments is anaphoric binding: nonovert arguments should be able to bind anaphors, while deleted arguments should not. Contrary to Blevins’ own conclusions for Finnish, the implicit argument in passives behaves as though it is deleted for the purposes of anaphoric binding. Moreover, a clear class of impersonal constructions, sometimes referred to as the “zero person” or the “missing subject” constructions, do license anaphoric binding of possessive affixes; see Hiietam & Manninen (2004) for more discussion of this constuction.

In Finnish, pronominal anaphors may be represented by a third person possessive suffix (Px), represented by a lengthening of the previous vowel followed by –n:

(62) Hän on ylpeä itselä-Px3.
   s/he be.3SG proud.NOM self-ELA-Px3
   ‘S/he is proud of himself/herself.’

Certain anaphors may occur in passives. However, these are restricted to idiomatic or lexicalised expressions derived from adverbs, nouns or non-finite verbs:

(63) a. Talo tuho-ttiin tahalla-an.
    house.NOM destroy-PASS.PAST on.purpose-Px3
    ‘The house was destroyed on purpose.’

   Manchester-INESS be-PASS in.fear-Px3 / drunk-Px3
   ‘In Manchester they are frightened (lit. ‘in their fear’) / drunk.’

Normal referential anaphoric pronouns cannot be bound in the same type of environment, as shown by the ill-formedness of (64a) and (65a). This is in contrast to the situation in true impersonal sentences, which license a nonovert argument which can still bind the anaphor; see (64b) and (65b):

(64) a. *Suihku-ssa pes-tiin hiuksea-ann.
    shower-INESS wash-PASS.PAST hair.PART-Px3
    ‘In the shower it was washed his/her hair.’

b. Jos suihku-ssa pese-e hiuksea-an...
   if shower-INESS wash-3SG hair.PART-Px3
   ‘If in the shower one washes one’s hair...’

van Steenbergen (1990) shows that –Vn has the status of an anaphor and must be bound within IP.
We take these data to be further evidence for a passive analysis for Finnish, at least according to the criteria presented in Blevins (2003). The data also provide evidence for a class of impersonals in Finnish in which the implicit argument is suppressed (syntactically overt) rather than deleted (syntactically inert).

5. Summary

In this paper, we have argued that Finnish has a passive and proposed a minimalist analysis for this construction. We have shown that Finnish meets a broad set of criteria for passivisation, including dedicated passive morphology, promotion (of an underlying direct object or some other XP) and demotion/deletion (of a human participant) in this language. We have also discussed a range of related phenomena including constraints on input verbs, agreement, case, agent phrases. Our analysis derives passivisation of various classes of verbs from the effects of a single [voice] feature in v. As a result, passive morphology targets the highest available human argument in the input, and blocks that argument from occurring in the specifier of the highest projection of v. This accounts for the wide range of possible input verbs in Finnish, including copulae and unaccusatives. Our approach therefore represents an extension of previous efforts (e.g. Comrie 1977, Blevins 2003) to subsume impersonal and personal passivisation under a single process of demotion or argument deletion. We also give evidence to suggest that the Finnish passive contrasts with a clear class of impersonal constructions in which the logical subject is suppressed rather than deleted. The criteria used to characterise the Finnish construction, and to establish its status as a passive, come from cross-linguistic studies, yet as Siewierska (1984) points out, a single definition of “passive” for all languages remains elusive. The best the linguist can do, it seems, is characterise the morphosyntactic properties of the passive for a particular language, and note when languages share these properties when formulating an analysis. We believe that from a cross-linguistic standpoint, the status of the Finnish passive is unambiguous.

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What is a passive? The case of Finnish


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