

Comrie 1977

Haspelmath 1990 Keenan 1976

Kholodovich 1974 Perlmutter and Postal 1977

Shanidze 1953

A Morphological Structure and Semantics of the Georgian So-called Passive Forms

Marine Ivanishvili & Ether Soselia
Tbilisi, the Oriental Institute
Georgian Academy of Sciences

The voice category, being one of the main verbal categories in a language, is traditionally considered to be discrete. It means that if there are two voice forms (active and passive) in a language, a verbal form may belong either to the active or to the passive voice; if there are three kinds of voice forms (active, passive and medium), then a verbal form may belong to one of these three. There is no unitary definition of the category, and even main points of the existing definitions (what determines the discrete nature of the category) are not homogeneous.

In the Georgian linguistic literature, voice is defined based on the relation between the action on the one hand, and subject and/or object on the other hand. This definition is characteristic for relational grammar where the essential thing for the defining voice is the change in grammatical relations (the so-called conversion); i.e. the noun, corresponding to the direct object in the transitive verbal construction, is converted into the subject. Thus in the passive, object promotion takes place because the noun, corresponding to the direct object on one level, becomes the subject on the next level. Passive forms are considered to be intransitive (see also ?), though according to ?, subject demotion takes place in the passive as well.

The definition of voice suggested by the founder of Georgian grammar, ?, and is also established on the relations between the action and the subject and/or object: “Voice is a verbal form which shows what kind of a relation there exists between the grammatically active person (i.e. subject) and the action expressed by the verb”. A. Shanidze gives several particulars of those relations:

- the action is brought about by the subject and directed to the other person (or object);
- the subject is usually a patient;
- the action is brought about by the subject in such a way, that it is neither directed to another person (or object), nor is the subject a patient.

Thus, according to ?, there are various kinds of relations between the verbal action and the subject. It is clear that those relations exist on the semantic level and they could be realized in various ways on the syntactic or morphological levels. The relations between those three levels concerning passive voice are quite complicated. In order to simplify the complexity of the phenomena, a difference has been drawn between diathesis and voice: diathesis was defined as the relation of the semantic data to the syntactic level, and voice was defined as morphologically marked diathesis (?).

Unfortunately, we do not share the opinion that the differentiation has simplified the problem. In order to define voice, we intend to specify what kind of voice a verbal form belongs to based on the syntactic structure. It is, however, also important to qualify the type of semantic relations of

the **subject** to the action expressed by the verbal form. Note that it is often impossible for the semantic relations to be qualified unambiguously, i.e., it is difficult to say whether the subject of a syntactic construction is an agent or a patient. As an example, let us consider the verb which conveys the notion of dying. What is the relation of the subject to the action expressed by the verb? In Georgian, the subject in this case seems to be more patient-like (rather than an agent), since the verb only appears in the passive form:

- (1) $\hat{E}aci$ $\hat{E}vdeba$
 man (nom.case) passive, root- $\hat{E}vd$ -to die
 A man is dying.

$\hat{E}vdeba$ is the so-called unmarked passive form (we will discuss below the Georgian passive markers), the root $\hat{E}vd$ - has no active forms. The Georgian verb could be compared to the English verb *to die* with analogous semantics. This verb only occurs in the non-passive form (but not active either, as it is never used in a transitive construction¹). According to the verb form in English, the subject is, therefore, not a patient (as it is in Georgian), but more agentive (it is not an agent). The English verb is comparable to the Russian verb (*on umiraet* “he dies”).

In our opinion, it was the ambiguity of semantic relations that led to the formation of a new interpretation of voice, as proposed by M. Shibatani, whose approach relies on the prototype analysis (?). It is a well-known typological fact that passive constructions are semantically manifold. In a great number of languages various semantic groups of the verbs are expressed by the passive voice constructions. M. Shibatani discusses such semantic groups of passive for a wide range of languages. The same semantic groups were also analyzed by ?, who studied the morphology of passive constructions. We will not go into the details of his analysis, but it is important to mention that such semantic groups are attested also among the forms of the passive voice in Georgian.

In order to explain why those forms are expressed by the same passive construction M. Shibatani defines the prototypical passive as follows:

1. primary pragmatic function: defocusing of the agent
2. semantic properties:
 - a. semantic valence: the predicate has got an agent and a patient
 - b. on the semantic level: the subject is affected
3. syntactic properties:
 - a. syntactic encoding: agent $\rightarrow \emptyset$ (not encoded)
 - b. difference in the valence of the predicate: in the passive equal to $(n - 1)$, n being the valence of the active form
4. morphological properties: no special marker for active, only for passive

The primary pragmatic function of defocusing the agent needs to be clarified. Using the term *focus* (from which ‘defocusing’ is derived from), ? is afraid of confusion, as the term is used by linguists in different senses. To avoid confusion, it would perhaps be desirable to use a different term, rather than the one the author prefers.

In order to know what defocusing means, we first have to define the positive term ‘focusing’. According to Shibatani’s explanation, every verb has its semantic frame or valence. All the entities, which correspond to the elements of semantic frame or valence, are considered as focused (since they are singled out from all other possible entities). They are singled out as essential elements requiring the listener’s attention in decoding the message. These semantically encoded elements are not equally important. Some of them are more important for the speaker and they call for

¹For semantic reasons, we do not think that examples like *He died a slow and painful death* are genuinely transitive.

will enable us to establish the universal model of the development of voice. All the semantic groups mentioned in the Georgian linguistic literature were reflected in our data. One of those groups consists of **deponents** (passive voice forms with active meaning). Deponents may be *mono-personal* or *bi-personal*. Some examples of mono-personal deponents are:

- (4) *igineba(is)* he swears, *iloceba (is)* he prays
iÚepeba(is) it barks, *iÚimeba (is)* he smiles

Obviously, these forms have an active meaning, but the subject of these constructions differs from the prototypical agent. First of all, it is not high in potency and second, it acts on itself, and the addressee of the action is unknown (to be more exact, the action could have been addressed to somebody, but the addressee is defocused). Thus, the subject of the deponents is active but not as much as the prototypical agent; therefore, the agent is defocused and a passive form is used in such cases.

Bi-personal deponents are passive forms with *e*-prefix. Some of them are semantically close to reciprocals in the sense that the action of the subjects of these constructions has its addressee, which is meant to act in the same (or analogous) way:

- (5) *eàidaveba (is mas)*
 He wrestles with somebody (who in his turn wrestles back).
 (6) *eÊaqmateba (is mas)*
 He argues with somebody (who in his turn argues back).

A part of those deponents is regarded as having the semantics of “being reverted into”, e.g. *emegobreba (is mas)* “He reverts to being somebody’s friend”. But in our opinion, the meaning is actually different: *emegobreba (is mas)* means rather “He acts in such a way as being somebody’s friend”. In the forms regarded above the subject is not a prototypical agent, therefore, it is defocused, and a passive form is used.

Other semantic groups expressed by the passive forms are:

1. potentials - ²

- (7) ak ar icxovreba
 here negative particle passive root-cxovr to live
 It is impossible to live here.
 (8) aq ar Êeisvleba
 here negative particle passive, stem Êesvl-to enter
 It is impossible to enter here.
 (9) ar gatetrdeba Êorani
 negative particle passive, root tetr-white raven (nom. Case)
 It is impossible to whiten a raven.
 (10) aq cxeni gaàendeba
 negative particle horse (nom. case) passive, root àen- to gallop
 It is possible to gallop a horse here.
 (11) es puri ar iàmeva
 this bread negative particle passive, root iàam- to eat
 This bread is inedible.

²Both negative and positive forms occur quite frequently.

passive voice forms have to be exactly defined. The final results of the research will enrich typological data of passive voice semantics and the general theory of voice category as well.

References

- Comrie, B. 1977. In defense of spontaneous demotion: The impersonal passive. In *Grammatical Relations: Syntax and Semantics*, 8, ed. P. Cole and J. Sadok, 47–48.
- Haspelmath, M. 1990. The Grammaticalisation of Passive Morphology. *Studies in Language* 4.
- Keenan, E. 1976. Some universals of passives in universal grammar. *CLS* 11.
- Kholodovich, A. A. 1974. *Typology of passive constructions. Diathesis and voice*. Leningrad (in Russian).
- Perlmutter, D., and P. Postal. 1977. Towards universal characterization of passivization. *BLS* 3.
- Shanidze, A. 1953. *Kartuli enis sapudzvebi, (The Georgian language)*. Tbilisi.
- Shibatani, M. 1985. Passives and related constructions: a prototype analysis. *Language* V:61, N4.