

A decomposed notion of Voice

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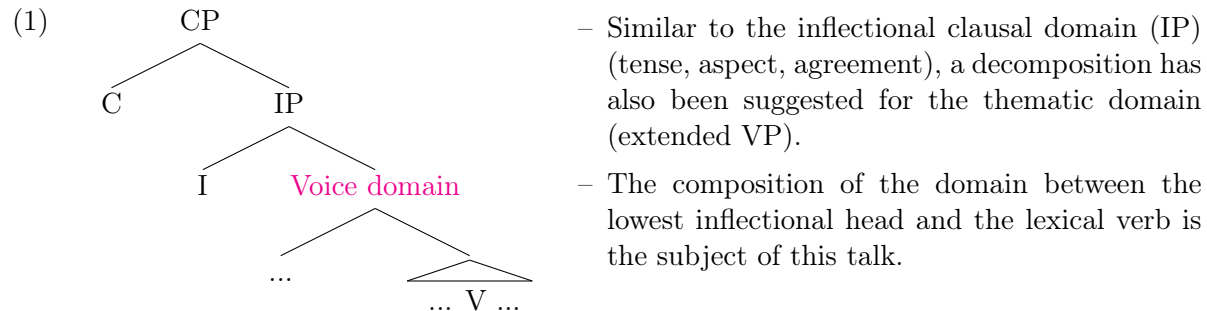
1 Introduction

General questions addressed in this talk

- What are the morphological, syntactic, and semantic components of Voice?
- Is Voice an elementary concept or a collection of properties?
- What similarities and differences can be found in the distribution of Voice across languages?

Theoretical context

- The notion(s) of Voice in a syntactic approach



Goals and main conclusions

- Comparison of active/passive and Austronesian Voice systems
→ There are major differences, but also important parallels.
- Decomposed notion of Voice
→ The uniform stable properties of Voice relate to the Agent (aka Actor, Initiator); variation arises in the morphosyntactic Voice properties.
- Evidence for a decomposed structural organization of Voice
→ Configurations where one component is missing (*lassen* passive) or the parts occur in different clauses (Voice restructuring).

2 Two types of Voice systems

2.1 Active/passive systems

(2) *Der Salat* wurde (*von den Vögeln*) mit großer Freude gefressen.

- Object promotion to subject
- Understood Agent (“someone”), optionally oblique
- Passive auxiliary, and participle morphology on verb

2.2 Austronesian Voice¹

- The Austronesian Voice system involves marking on the verb and promotion of an argument (including functions such as locative or benefactive).
- The type of verbal marking indicates which argument (actor, patient ...) is promoted.
- Debates:
 - What kind of promotion? Promotion to subject, topic, both?
 - What kind of trigger? Case, ergativity, topichood, a mix thereof?
 - Terminology: *Voice*, *Topic*, *Focus*—Actor Voice/Topic/Focus (AV/AT/AF); Patient/Object Voice (OV/PV). I will use PV, for cases where the direct object is promoted.

(3) Acehnese

- | | | | |
|----|--|---------------|------------------------|
| a. | <i>Uleue nyan di-kap lôn.</i>
snake DEM 3FAM-bite 1SG
‘The snake bit me.’ | Active | [Legate 2014: 4, (1a)] |
| b. | <i>Lôn di-kap lé uleue nyan.</i>
1SG 3FAM-bite by snake DEM
‘I was bitten by the snake.’ | Passive | [Legate 2014: 4, (1b)] |
| c. | <i>Lôn uleue nyan kap.</i>
1SG snake DEM bite
‘I was bitten by the snake.’ | Patient Voice | [Legate 2014: 5, (1c)] |

There are systematic differences between Passive and PV (within Acehnese and in general).

- Passive is comparable to Indo-European-type passive:
 - The Agent is an oblique/PP (see Legate 2012, 2014 for evidence that the *le* phrase is a PP).
 - The oblique Agent is optional.
 - When no oblique is present, the Agent is interpreted existentially.

(4) *Aneuk nyan di-kap (lé uleue nyan).*
child DEM 3FAM-bite (LE snake DEM)
‘The child was bitten (by the snake).’ [Legate 2014: 26, (45)]

¹This section is based on Travis 2021 and discussions with her.

- PV shares some properties with active, some with passive:
 - The **object** is promoted (~ passive).
 - The **subject** is *not* demoted (~ active) (in some languages, it cliticizes onto Voice, but in others, such as Acehnese, it can be a full DP).
 - The **Agent** DP or clitic is obligatory (~ active).
 - The **Agent** is a true argument (~ active)

- (5) a. *Lôn uleue nyan kap.*
 1SG snake DEM bite
 ‘I was bitten by the snake.’ [Legate 2014: 5, (1c)]
- b. *Aneuk nyan *(uleue nyan) kap.*
 child DEM *(snake DEM) bite
 ‘The child was bitten (by the snake).’ [Legate 2014: 69, (124b)]

- Imperatives:
 - Subject argument is implicit.
 - PV: an implicit Agent can bind an object reflexive.
 - Passive: passive imperatives are impossible in some languages (but not all); implicit Agent cannot bind an object reflexive.

- (6) Indonesian
- a. *Salah-kan dirimu.*
 PV.wrong-CAUS SELF.2
 ‘Blame yourself.’ [Arka 2003: 60, (48a)]
- b. **Di-salah-kan diri-mu.*
 PASS-wrong-CAUS SELF.2
 ‘Blame yourself.’ [Arka 2003: 60, (48b)]

- Binding differences:
 - The moved object can be bound by the Agent in PV, but not in passive.
 - The object cannot be treated as a mere A' element, since, in contrast to passive Agents, it can control (Legate 2014) and be controlled (Arka and Manning 1998).

- (7) Indonesian
- a. *?*Dirinya di-serahkan ke Polisi oleh Amir*
 SELF.3 PASS-surrender to police by Amir
 Lit. ‘Himself was surrendered to the police by Amir.’
 ‘I was surrendered by myself to the police.’ [Arka and Manning 1998: 4, (6a)]
- b. *Diri-saya saya serahkan ke polisi*
 SELF-1 1SG surrender to police
 ‘I surrendered myself to the police.’ [Arka and Manning 1998: 7, (16a)]

2.3 Summary

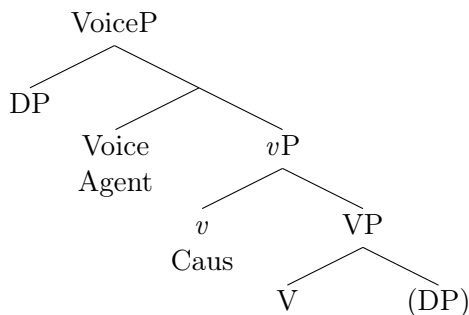
Property	Passive	PV
Object promotion	promotion to subject	promotion to highest argument, topic argument
Agent	existentially closed or oblique	argument
Voice morphology	auxiliary common (but not necessary)	agglutinating, possibly zero

3 Decomposed Voice (domain)

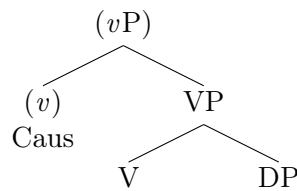
3.1 Decomposed Voice domain

- Split Voice domain: separating Voice, Caus, verbalizer, Applicative, possibly others.
- See, among others, [Bowers 2002](#), [Pylkkänen 2002, 2008](#), [Folli and Harley 2005](#), [Alexiadou et al. 2006](#), [Marantz 2008](#), [Schäfer 2008](#), [Harley 2009, 2017](#), [Pitteroff and Alexiadou 2012](#), [Pitteroff 2014](#).
- Language variation: Bundling of Agent and CAUS properties into a single head.

(8) Transitive, unergative



Unaccusative, anti-causative



Back to the familiarity marker in Acehnese

- The familiarity marker is a Voice element which tracks the **Agent**, not the subject.
- It has the same distribution as **Agent Voice**:
 - It occurs below modals, negation, aspect.
 - It does not appear with unaccusatives or non-verbal predicates.
 - It occurs above the causative.

(9) a. **Lôn lôn-kap lé uleue nyan.*

1SG 1SG-bite **by snake** DEM

‘I was bitten by the snake.’

[[Legate 2014](#): 10, (6)]

b. *Hasan geu-peu-reubah aneuk miet nyan.*

Hasan 3POL-CAUS-fall child small DEM

‘Hasan caused the child to fall.’

[[Legate 2014](#): 29, (50a)]

Language variation

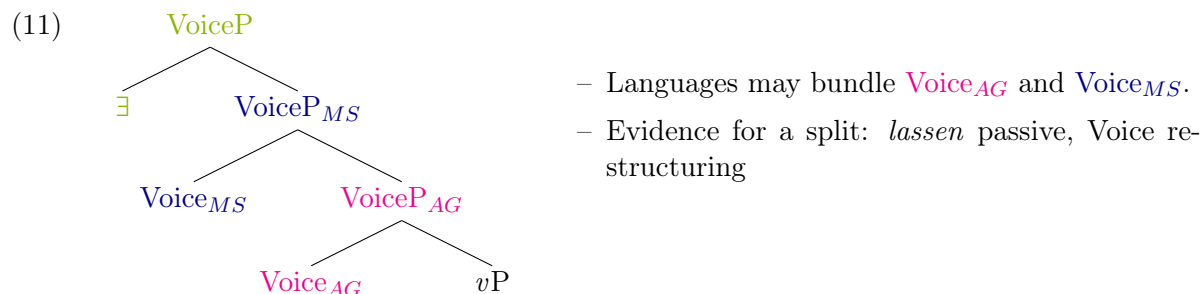
(10) Harley 2017 (16, (24)):

- a. Voice-bundling language:
 - (i) has relationship between verbalizing morphology and Agent introduction
 - (ii) can have relationship between internal case checking and Agent introduction
 - (iii) has a single position of exponence for verbalizing, causativizing, inchoative, and “passivizing” morphology.
- b. Voice-splitting language:
 - (i) has agglutinating (“stacking”) passive morphology
 - (ii) can have high applicatives
 - (iii) can show causative morphology in the absence of a syntactic Causer argument.

Relevant point to take away: There is a functional head **Voice** which associates the VP/*v*P with an argument position corresponding to an **Agent** (or similar thematic relation).

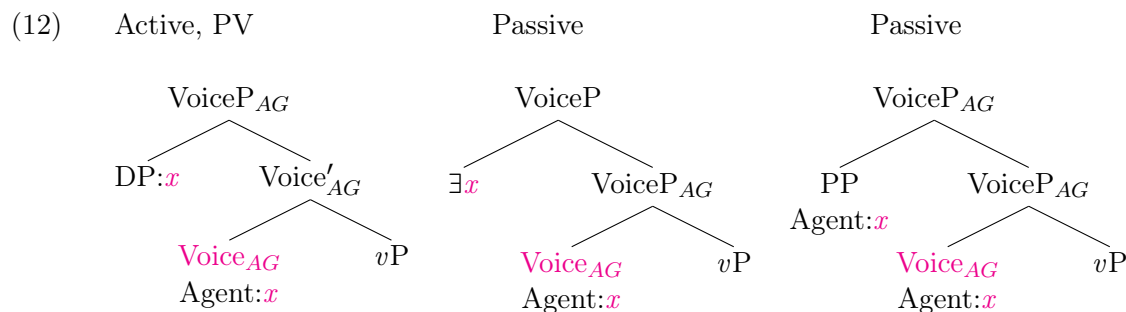
3.2 Decomposed Voice

- Components of Voice (based on the passive proposals in Embick 2004, Bruening 2013):
 - **Voice_{AG}**: introduces an **Agent** argument position (not necessarily an Agent argument).
 - **Voice_{MS}**: introduces morpho-syntactic Voice properties (such as passive morphology, Case).
 - **Existential closure**: after completion of the voice domain, open variables are existentially closed.



3.3 Unifying the two Voice systems

- **Voice_{AG}** is present in (non-unaccusative) active, passive, and PV.
- Differences arise in the way the Agent argument slot is saturated: DP, existential closure, oblique

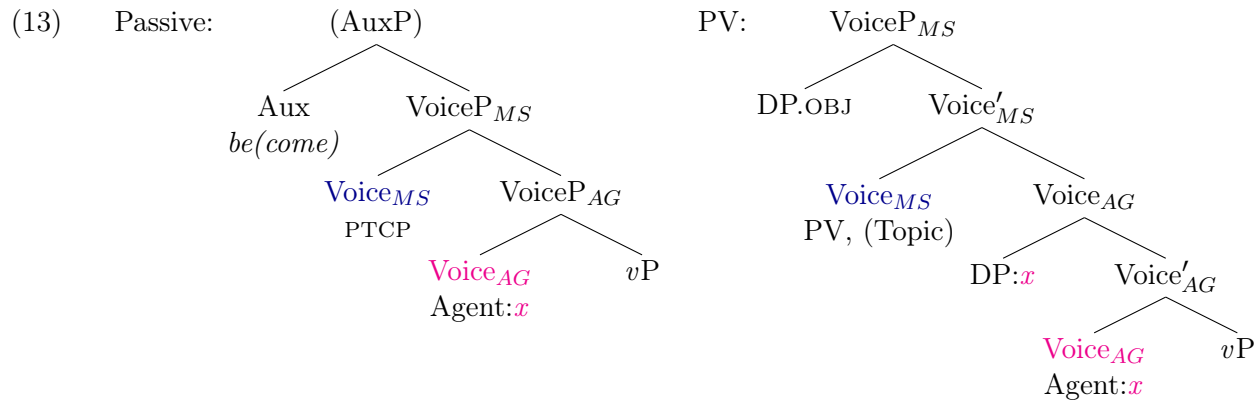


Aside—Case

- In both passive and PV, the object is promoted and it is usually assumed that it does not receive structural object case.
- The lack of objective case (ACC) in passive is typically associated with the lack of a DP Agent argument, which cannot directly be applied in PV contexts.
- A unified approach is nevertheless possible if the mixed nature of PV (no objective case, but a non-oblique DP argument), is assumed to follow from a special lexical case for the Agent DP in PV (Legate 2014, Travis 2021).
- In a *Dependent Case* approach, oblique and lexically case-marked arguments do not qualify as case competitors, which excludes assignment of dependent case to the object.

Voice_{MS} is the main locus for variation.

- Passive Voice_{MS} (Embick 2004 AspP, Bruening 2013 PassP):
 - selects a non-saturated Voice_{AG}
 - participle morphology
 - may be selected by a further higher auxiliary head.
- PV Voice_{MS} :
 - selects a saturated Voice_{AG}
 - may also contain additional information such as Topic (see Pearson 2005)
 - prominent argument may move to the specifier (Rackowski and Richards 2005)



Property	Passive	PV
Object promotion	promotion to subject	promotion to highest argument, topic argument
Agent	existentially closed or oblique	argument
Voice morphology	auxiliary common (but not necessary)	agglutinating, possibly zero

- Possible direction regarding Voice morphology: Bundling of Voice_{AG} and Voice_{MS} .

4 Evidence for split Voice

4.1 *Lassen* passive

- *Lassen* ‘let/make’ passive: the embedded subject can be dropped (German does not allow dropped non-topic subjects otherwise).
- *Lassen* middles: *lassen* occurs with the reflexive *sich*; the **object is promoted** to matrix subject.
- *Lassen* middles share some properties with canonical middles, but [Pitteroff 2014](#) shows in detail that there are also differences (e.g., the adverb is not required).
- In both constructions, the matrix verb is active causative *lassen*; the embedded verb is also morphologically active.

- (14) a. *Er ließ ø die Fensterscheibe putzen.*
He let ø the window.glass clean
‘He let/made someone clean the window.’
lassen passive
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (4a)]
- b. *Die Fensterscheibe lässt sich leicht putzen.*
The window.glass lets itself easily clean
‘The window cleans easily.’
lassen middles
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (4b)]

- Embedded passive is impossible in both constructions.

- (15) a. **Er ließ die Fensterscheibe geputzt (werden).*
He let the window.glass cleaned (become)
Intended: ‘He let the window be cleaned.’
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (5a)]
- b. **Die Fensterscheibe lässt sich leicht geputzt (werden).*
The window.glass lets itself easily cleaned (become)
Intended: ‘It is easy for the window to be cleaned.’
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (5b)]

- Nevertheless, despite the impossible passive morphology, both *lassen* passive and *lassen* middles show the properties of embedded syntactic passive.
- **Oblique Agents** are possible.

- (16) a. *Das Buch liest sich (*von kleinen Kindern) gut.*
The book reads itself (***by little children**) well
‘The book reads well (*by little children).’
Canonical middle
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 46, (40a)]
- b. *Das Buch lässt sich (von kleinen Kindern) gut lesen.*
The book lets itself (**by little children**) well read.
‘The book can be read easily (by small children).’
lassen middle
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 47, (41a)]
- c. *Der Mann lässt von dem Handwerker die Türe öffnen.*
The man lets **by the craftsman** the door open
‘The man makes the craftsman open the door.’
lassen passive
[[Pitteroff 2014](#):77, (44)]

- Verbal passive (vs. adjectival passive) typically triggers a disjoint reference effect with the promoted object (a “not-self” implicature?).

- (17) a. *Die Kinder wurden gekämmt.*
 The children became combed
 (i) Someone other than the children combed the children.
 (ii) *The children combed the children. Verbal passive
[Pitteroff 2014: 89, (74a)]
- b. *Die Kinder waren gekämmt.*
 The children were combed
 (i) Someone other than the children combed the children.
 (ii) The children combed the children. Adjectival passive
[Pitteroff 2014: 90, (74b)]

- Both *lassen* passive and *lassen* middles show the same disjoint reference effect.

- (18) a. *Die Mutter ließ die Kinder kämmen.*
 The mother lets the children comb
 (i) The mother made someone comb the children.
 (ii) *The mother made the children comb themselves. *lassen* passive
[Pitteroff 2014: 90, (76a)]
- b. *Dieses Kind lässt sich (leicht) kämmen.*
 This child lets itself (easily) comb
 (i) Someone other than the child can comb the child easily.
 (ii) *It is easy for the child to comb itself. *lassen* middle
[Pitteroff 2014: 107, (35a)]

- The embedded predicate must be a causative (which can be passivized), and cannot be an inchoative (which cannot be passivized).

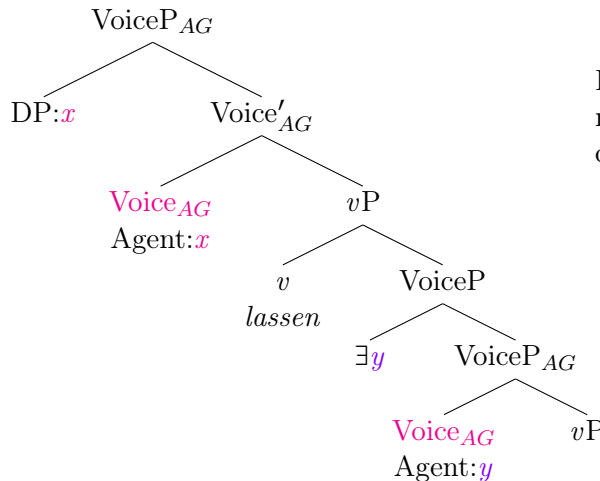
- (19) a. *Dieses Schiff lässt sich leicht versenken / *versinken.*
 This ship lets itself easily sink.CAUS / *sink.INCH
 “This ship can be sunk easily.” *lassen* middle
[Pitteroff 2014: 111, (44a)]
- b. *Der Pate lässt das Schiff von seinen Handlangern versenken / *versinken.*
 The godfather lets the ship by his henchmen sink.CAUS / *sink.INCH
lassen passive
[Pitteroff 2014:233, (27a)]

Relevance and analysis

- The embedded predicate shows all hallmark properties of passive, except the morphology.
- Things fall in place when we separate *Voice_{AG}* and *Voice_{MS}*.
- Following Pitteroff 2014, *lassen* passive/middles involve an embedded passive *Voice_{AG}*—i.e., an unsaturated *VoiceP_{AG}* without an Agent argument DP.
- In contrast to “regular” passive, *VoiceP_{MS}* is omitted, e.g., as a form of restructuring.

- When the embedded thematic cycle is complete, existential closure applies (unless a PP Agent is merged).
- The verb is realized as a default infinitive, since there is no $Voice_{MS}$ to specify a value.

(20) *Lassen* passive



Passive syntax/semantics ($Voice_{AG}$ and \exists) needs to be separated from passive morphology ($VoiceP_{MS}$).

4.2 Voice restructuring

4.2.1 Phenomena and distribution

- A range of languages allow constructions in which an embedded argument is promoted to matrix subject.
- [long object promotion \[LOP\]](#).
- Evidence for LOP: Case, agreement, language specific A-movement properties.

(21) $DP.NOM$ $Voice.PASS/PV$ [$Voice.DEFAULT/PASS/PV$ $DP.OBJ$]

Three types of constructions which differ in the morphological patterns and the origin of the subject

- Default Voice: Acehnese, Amis, Croatian, Czech, European Portuguese, German, Italian, Japanese, Kannada, Kavalan, Matu'uwal Atayal, Paiwan, Puyuma, Saaroa, Sediq, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish, Takibakha Bunun
- Embedded verb realizes the default morphological form (see [Wurmbrand and Shimamura 2017](#) for evidence).

(22) Infinitive default

As casas foram abacadas de construir em 1950.
 the houses were finished to build in 1950
 'They finished to build the houses in 1950.'

European Portuguese
 [[Cinque 2002](#): 5, (7a)]

- (23) AV default
- a. *naqaru-un i t-um-uting ni yumin ku bawaq*
 finish-[PV] LNK beat-[AV]-beat GEN Yumin NOM pig
 ‘Yumin finished beating/killing the pigs.’
 Matu’uwal Atayal
 [Chen 2010: 5/19, (8a)/(38c)]
- b. **naqaru-un i tuting-un ni yumin ku bawaq*
 finish-[PV] LNK beat-[PV] GEN Yumin NOM pig
 ‘Yumin finished beating/killing the pigs.’
 [Chen 2010: 11, (25b)]

• Voice Matching: Isbukun Bunun, Saisiyat, Tsou

- (24) a. *Iliskinun-ku bunbun-a tu baliv-un.*
 want-[PV]-1.SG.ACC banana-that.NOM TU buy-[PV]
 Lit. ‘The bananas are wanted to be bought by me.’
 ‘I wanted to buy the bananas.’ Isbukun Bunun [Wu 2013: 40, (10b)]
- b. Non-matching combinations impossible

• Crossed Control: Balinese, Chamorro, Madurese, Sundanese (I. Paul, J. Vander Klok, p.c.); Indonesian, Javanese, Malagasy, Tagalog, Tongan, Tukang Besi, Samoan (Polinsky and Potsdam 2008)

- (25) Crossed Control = CC (Regular control = RC) Indonesian
- a. *Anak mau [kamu ø-peluk.]*
 child want [2.SG [PV]-hug]
 RC: ‘The child wants to be hugged by you.’
 CC: ‘You want to hug the child.’ [Berger 2019: 62, (9)]
- b. *Kucing-nya coba [di-cium oleh Esti.]*
 cat-3.SG try [[PASS]-kiss by Esti]
 RC: ‘Her cat tried to be kissed by Esti.’
 CC: ‘Esti tried to kiss her cat.’ [Sato and Kitada 2012: (27)]

Distribution of (im)possible combinations (Davies 2014, Kurniawan 2013, Natarina 2018)

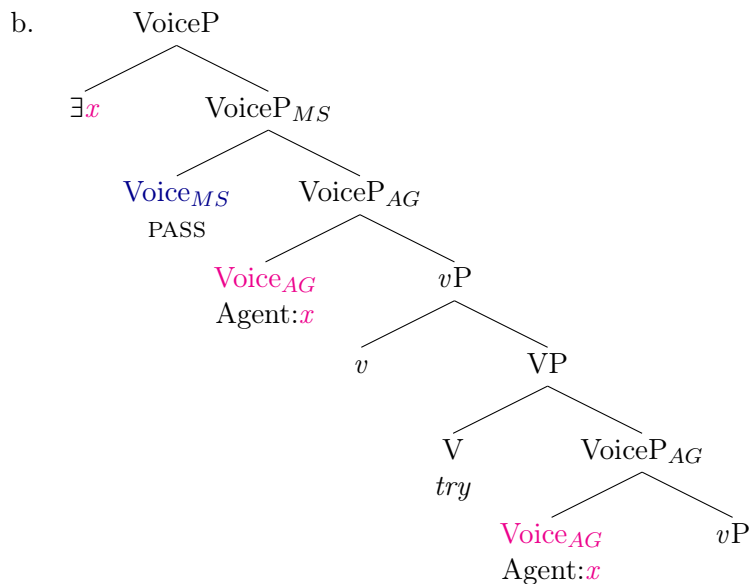
	V1	V2	Agent high	Agent low
A.	bare	PV	n/a	Indonesian, Balinese, Sundanese, Madurese
B.	bare	PASS	n/a	Indonesian, Balinese
C.	PASS	PASS	Norwegian	Chamorro, Indonesian
D.	PV	PV	Isbukun Bunun	Sundanese, Madurese
E.	PASS	default	German, Japanese...	n/a
F.	PV	default AV	Mayrinax Atayal	n/a
G.	PASS	PV	??	*
H.	default AV	PASS/PV	n/a	*

For details: Ileana Paul, Lisa Travis, Jozina Vander Klok, Susi Wurmbrand. Crossed control as Voice restructuring. *Annual Meeting of the Canadian Linguistic Association* (this Friday).

4.2.2 Back to Voice

- Important property of Voice restructuring: the matrix and embedded Agents are shared.
- Preliminary direction (Wurmbrand 2002, Grano 2015): semantic requirement of certain matrix verbs (possibly the entire class of *exhaustive control* predicates).
- But syntactically, there is only one argument (either in the matrix or the embedded clause, depending on the type of voice restructuring/language).
- For the view on Voice here, this means that there cannot be existential closure in the embedded clause (if there was, the properties of the matrix verb would not be met).
- Like in *lassen* passive, on the other hand, Voice_{MS} is again missing in the embedded clause.

(26) a. *Zu reparieren wurde nur der Wagen versucht.*
 To repair was only the.NOM car tried.
 ‘They only tried to repair the car.’



5 Conclusion

- The concept of Voice
- What are the morphological, syntactic, and semantic components of Voice?
 → Voice comprises of the semantic introduction of an Agent argument and language-specific morphological properties. These properties can correspond to distinct syntactic heads, as evidenced by configurations in which one of the components is missing or located in a higher domain.
- Is Voice an elementary concept or a collection of properties?
 → A collection of properties, which may be syntactically distinct or bundled in one position. It needs to be further investigated if these options correspond to different types of Voice systems.

- What similarities and differences can be found in the distribution of Voice across languages?
 ↪ The Agent property is manifested cross-linguistically in passive and PV, whereas morphosyntactic properties such as verbal inflection and Case show variation.

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