German Passives

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1.1 Introduction

In the first section of our paper we will examine passive constructions in German. Similar to the obligatory passive be in English passive constructions, German contains a passive verb wird. This passive verb occupies “little v” and thus always dominates the main verb, but is dominated by any modal or auxiliary verbs.

Additionally, similar to English, the specifier of a VP (generally agents and experiencers) in an active phrase instead becomes a PP adjunct in a passive phrase.

Furthermore, we find that the EPP feature of T behaves much like the corresponding EPP in English. If there is no DP to be raised to subject position, a CP may be raised to satisfy its EPP requirement.

We also find that German allows for insertion of a dummy subject es. We will touch upon such phenomenon in the first section but expand on such constructions in 3.1. Additionally, we will discuss phonologically silent PROgen in general statements in 4.1.

2.1 Passive Constructions

Firstly, we will examine the passive construction of embedded clauses. Considering sentences (1) and (2), we find that DP complements to V that receive ACC case in active sentences instead receive NOM case in passive sentences and raise to spec T. Like in English, the passive verb in little v is not a case-assigner, so elements like der Gewinn in (2) can receive NOM case from T. Additionally, the subject in an active construction if found as a PP adjunct to VP in passives and given an oblique case value.

(1) Die Rechnungen zeigen, dass die Firma den Gewinn vergrössert hat.

The calculations show the firm the ACC profit exaggerated has

“The calculations show that the firm has exaggerated the profits.”

(2) Die Rechnungen zeigen, dass der Gewinn von der Firma vergrössert worden ist.

The calculations show the NOM profit by the firm exaggerated become is

“The calculations show that the profits have been exaggerated by the firm.”

We assume the following structural derivation of (2).
This deep structure of (2) illustrates another idiosyncrasy of the passive construction in German: only the auxiliary verb *ist* may select for a passive verb as the head of its complement. In each example of passive provided in our data, the auxiliary verb *hat* does not select the passive verb *worden*.

Once V to T and DP to Spec, TP movements are applied to the root and embedded clauses – and after T to C and DP to Spec, CP movements are applied to solely the root clause – the following surface structure of (2) is created.
3.1 Movement of CPs

Moving on to sentence (3), we find that if the structure has no DPs, but a CP is present, this CP may be raised to satisfy the EPP feature on T. Subsequently, it may be raised again to satisfy the EPP on C. This displays another facet of German that parallels English, given we find CP subjects under the same circumstance, when the EPP feature on T cannot be satisfied with a DP with NOM case.

(3) Dass Affen von Kindern nach Hause gebracht werden, wird
    C monkeys by children to house bring.PART become.PRES.PL become.PRES.SG
    von allen Müttern beklagt.

von allen Müttern beklagt.
by all mothers deplore.PART

"That all monkeys are brought home by children is deplored by all mothers."

Here we see the clause *dass Affen von Kindern nach Hause gebracht würden* in the specifier position of C. In order for the structure to satisfy the EPP feature on T, it must be the case that the CP is raised from the complement position of the verb *beklagt*, since there are no other constituents present that appear valid for raising.

The following structure illustrates a possible construction of the deep structure of example (3).

The main verb in the root clause of this sentence, *beklagt*, selects a CP complement and contains a PP adjunct; however, this verb has not selected a DP argument. With no CP to raise to Spec, T
or Spec, C, this CP complement must fulfill the EPP on C. These movements create the following surface structure of example (3).

In the previous derivation, we have assumed that the CP das Affen von allen Müttern nach House gebracht wören was first raised to Spec, T and then to Spec, C. The hypothesis used to create this construction assumes that this subject CP was used to satisfy both EPP on T and EPP on C. We leave open a second that the PP von allen Müttern is a valid candidate for raising. In this second hypotheses, the PP is raised to the specifier position of T, given that the structure can be read the same linearly whether the final PP is raised or not. From here, the EPP on C selects any constituent, such as the CP complement to the main verb, and is not interested in selecting the highest possible constituent to raise. This is of course if PP adjuncts could ever satisfy the EPP feature on T at all, a hypothesis which we do not yet have evidence for, and thus prefer the former hypothesis.

While this may only be representative of the small amount of data at hand, it seems indicative that the EPP on both T and C begrudgingly take non-DP constituents into their specifiers.

Furthermore, let us consider example (4).

(4) Es ist schade, dass sein Affe von den Kindern nach Hause gebracht. uner ist.
It is shame that a.NOM monkey by the children to house bring.PART
“it is a shame that a monkey has been brought home by the children.”

In example (4), the CP complement to schade is not raised to either the specifier of T or to the specifier of C. Furthermore, the DP schade dass sein Affe von den Kindern nach Hause gebracht does not raise to fulfill EPP feature on C. The meaningless DP es must then fulfill the EPP on C. There are two hypotheses which could explain the linear word order of (4). One hypothesis is that the dummy subject es is inserted into Spec, T and raised to Spec, C. However, a second hypothesis is possible, in which the

That's not a DP.
In this first structure, the DP es is inserted into the specifier of T to fulfill EPP on T. Es is then raised to the specifier of C in order to fulfill the EPP on C. The structure below contains a DP es which has been inserted directly into the specifier of C, while the DP complement to main verb ist has been raised to the specifier of T.
If we turn our attention to another utterance which displays insertion of a meaningless DP, (5), we find that we must support the former hypothesis. Namely, es is inserted into the specifier of T and then raised into C's specifier. This is due to the fact that there are no DP arguments of V, only a CP which is clearly not raised to subject position.

(5) Es wird von allen Müttern befohlen, dass Affen nicht von Kindern.

It become.PRES by all mothers command.PART C monkeys not by children
nach Hause gebracht wärden
in house bring.PART become.PRES.PL
“It is commanded by all mothers that monkeys not be brought home by kids.

As we can see, there is no constituent occupying T’s specifier in the surface-structure of (5). The root clause es wird von allen Muttern befohlen does not raise the embedded CP to its specifier position. Thus, for both (4) and (5) we must determine that the meaningless DP is inserted into spec T and raised to spec C, continuing the trend in our data.

However, we find something odd with the verb/complement ordering in the root clause of (5). The CP complement to V appears to its right, i.e. befohlen [CP dass...] rather than [CP dass...] befohlen. Given the CP is what is a complement to V and one key point in our hypothesis regarding the structure of German utterances is that all VPs are right-headed, we should expect to find the embedded clause to the left of the V, but this is inexplicably not what we see with CP complements to verbs. This pattern requires more investigation which we are not yet prepared to provide, as it does not seem relevant to our discussion of passives and es insertion.

Despite our inability to account for the placement of the V and its complement in the root clause of (5) we can at least say that es is inserted in the specifier of T. Therefore, just as it is the case in English, T’s EPP feature in German constructions may be satisfied with a meaningless and case-less DP. As well, we might posit that German has a tendency to raise what is in the specifier of T in order to satisfy the EPP on root Cs. We will explore this insertion phenomina more in the next section.

4.1 Es Insertion

Why do you say it? We learned last week that the EPP on C is promiscuous.

The following data demonstrates that German allows dummy pronoun insertion that occupies spec C in the surface form. We see this in (6) with the the dummy pronoun es.

(6) Es wurde ihm geholfen.

It become.PAST him.DAT help.PART
‘He was helped.’

Verbs that assign DAT case still assign DAT case in the passive, as seen in the following examples, overriding the NOM case that T wants to assign. While this seems contradictory to our theory since T in the examples considered will always assign NOM case to a DP in a local VP, based on the raising patterns we are about to discuss, there doesn’t seem to be any element with NOM case in the construction above.
We posit that the dummy es can be inserted into spec T when there is no eligible element with [NOM] case to satisfy the EPP feature on T. In such situations, German has two options—raise a different XP or insert the dummy es. If it chooses this insertion option, es obligatorily moves from spec TP to spec CP and leaves a trace in spec TP. We can contrast (6) with (7), in which the pronoun es occupies spec T at surface structure while ihm simultaneously occupies spec C, which results in ungrammaticality.

(7) *ihm wurde es geholfen.
    Him.DAT become.PAST help.PART

(7) is rendered ungrammatical because if es can only be inserted to satisfy the EPP feature on T, it must move to spec CP. As a consequence, no other XP can to spec CP or spec TP.

This contrasts with the grammatical (8) below, in which ihm from its thematic position to spec TP and subsequently spec CP. This demonstrates that like CPs, DPs with dative case can satisfy EPP on T if there are no NOM DPs available, but that there remains the option of inserting a dummy element to fulfill this property instead.

(8) ihm wurde geholfen
    him.DAT become.PAST help.PART

Provided below is the derivation of (8). After originated in its thematic position shown above, it moves to spec VP, then through spec TP, then up to its surface position, spec CP.

4.1 PROgen

We see that German can satisfy the EPP feature on T without any overt DPs filling the specifier of T position. Consider (9).
(9) Ich glaube, dass in diesem Raum gearbeitet wird.
I believe C in this.DAT room work.PART become.PRES
'I think that in this room one works.'

In (9), there are no overt DP arguments of gearbeitet. Assuming that gearbeitet requires at least one argument and that EPP must be satisfied suggests that in such general constructions, there is an underlying PROgen that isn't phonologically realized, but originates as a complement to the verb and can raise to satisfy the EPP property on T, seen below.

Sentences (10) and (11) are other such constructions in which the main verb has no phonologically realized arguments, in which we see the main verb geholfen but no arguments for such verb, only the adjuncts wie im Forum and am besten, leading us to believe that it is another case of PROgen in spec TP.

(10) Ich frage mich wie im Forum am besten geholfen werden
I ask me how in-the.DAT forum the best help.PART become.NFIN
can.
'I wonder how one can best be helped in the Forum.'

Both (9) and (10) contrast with (11) which contains the dummy pronoun es.
(11) *Ich frage mich wie im Forum am besten es geholfen werden kann.

In (11), we again see the dummy pronoun es inserted into spec T. If there were truly no candidates for raising to TP, we would expect that the insertion of this dummy element in such a position to be acceptable. However, given that it is not, we can assume that there is an underlying PROgen in that position, blocking the insertion of es.

5.1 Conclusion

German passives have a similar structure to those of English, which require a passive verb in little v and allow for DPs that receive ACC case in active constructions (e.g., themes) to receive NOM case and raise to subject position in passives, with the corresponding subject in active constructions instead appearing as the object in a PP adjunct.

However, through our analysis of passives, we have learned more about the EPP property on the German T. It seems like while a DP with NOM case must move to spec TP if available, German T will accept other XPs, like CPs or DPs in dative case, if necessary.

I'm not sure I saw one of those in spec TP.

We also posit that German possesses a dummy pronoun es that can be inserted into spec TP to satisfy the EPP feature on T when there is no available DP[NOM]. This dummy pronoun subsequently raises to spec CP and leaves behind a trace that prohibits movements of other elements into spec TP.

We also claim that German possesses a non-phonologically realized PROgen for general statements like (9) and (10), which originates as the sole complement to the verb and raises into spec TP. Our analysis of es-insertion helps support this hypothesis, as es cannot be inserted into spec TP in such constructions. This backs the claim that while there is no material phonologically realized in this position, a silent PROgen occupies spec TP at surface. This prohibits the insertion of dummy elements, as EPP is satisfied by PROgen.

Let's talk.