Lirim Selmani

The passive in German and Albanian
Forms and functions

The relatively simple way of forming the passive in German (with the auxiliaries *sein/werden* + past participle) contrasts with highly complex passive morphology in Albanian, which is particularly evident in the synthetic passive (1) (Agalliu/Angoni/Demiraj 1995). In addition, the passive can be formed analytically with the verb *është* "sein/to be" + quasi infinitive (2) and using the particle *u* (3):

(1)   *dritarja **mbyll*** _{VERBSTAMM}***-et*** _{PASSIVSUFFIX}
          'The window is closed'

(2)   *dritarja **është** mbyllur*
          'The window has been closed'

(3)   *dritarja **u** mbyll*
          'The window was closed'

The distribution of these different means depends on tense and mood, whereby the passive forms of some verbs are the same as reflexive structures, a case of reflexive-passive diathesis (Pani 1997). If the subject is inanimate, it is a passive structure that is being used; otherwise both interpretations are possible. In German, the passive system is characterised by *syntacticisation*, with Albanian making use of both *morphologicalisation* (synthetic and *u*-passive) and *syntacticisation* (analytic passive). Analytic passive forms are syntactic constructions that probably originated through language contact. The synthetic version of the passive shows that diathesis has been *morphologicalised* and is thus native to Albanian.

The passive transformations that can be realised because passive clauses can be related to corresponding active clauses (but without being regarded as pure alternatives Eroms 2000, Welke 2012) lead to a restructuring of the complement in both German and Albanian, resulting in the accusative complement of the active transitive clause being promoted to the patient subject of the intransitive passive clause and the agent in the passive clause being downgraded to a prepositional complement, which does not have to be verbalised in the vast majority of cases. In both languages primarily transitive-agentive verbs can be used in the passive while the statal passive is restricted to incremental verbs (and it must, in principle, be possible to trace it back to a processual passive).

This transformation leads to the downgrading of the active agent to an optional adjunct in the passive clause that is not verbalised in either German or Albanian in the vast majority of contexts due to pragmatic factors (concerning the theme-rheme structure) (Zifonun/Hoffmann/Strecker 1997). Prifti's corpus (2009, p. 54) reveals that passive forms have a frequency value of 9% in German and 24% (including the medio-passive) in Albanian. The pure passive occurs with about the same frequency in both languages (below 10%), both in newspaper articles and literary texts (Prifti 2009, pp. 56 f.).

In Albanian the agent complement in passive clauses tends not to be verbalised; this happens more frequently than in German (Prifti 2009, p. 88), particularly in literary language as Prifti's corpus analysis shows (2009, p. 76): in Albanian the agent complement is used

in only 6% of all passive clauses while in German it is 25%. The reasons for omitting the agent are essentially the same in both Albanian and German: the agent is unimportant or known, the agent is unknown or the agent should remain anonymous. Some genres such as instructions require the agent not to be named because the steps to be taken are foregrounded (Prifti 2009, pp. 78–82).

Another difference between German and Albanian consists in the fact that agentivity and non-agentivity in Albanian resolve reflexive-passive syncretism. If the subject is non-agentive, the reflexive reading can be ruled out as only animate beings can refer back to themselves.

Even though there are morphosyntactic differences in the formation, both languages embrace the communicative function, which should always play a central role when comparing languages. The function is to re-perspectivise an event (Ágel 2017) in such a way that the agent is decentred so that the patient or predication comes into focus. In this way, what the speaker wants to emphasise in particular can be given more communicative weight and be placed in the foreground during processing. Centring the patient turns what is actually a rhematic expression in subject position into a thematic one in order to move the rest of the rheme, the predication, more effectively into the listener's focus of attention (Myhill 1997; Schoenthal 1976).

Both Albanian and German also have the impersonal passive, the difference being that it is always without a subject in Albanian (also because there is no equivalent to *es* "it"). One difference between Albanian and German is that in Albanian, it is not possible to verbalise the agent complement in an impersonal passive construction (Prifti 2009, p. 117) while in German it is unusual but still possible. In contrast to German (Primus 2011), the restriction to agentive and atelic verbs seems to hold with the statal passive.

What the indefinite pronoun *man* "one" does in German (Eggs 2017) is expressed by the verb *thonë* "sagen/say" in the 3rd person plural (without a subject) in Albanian (Prifti 2009, pp. 143–145). As a pro-drop language, Albanian is a subject-averse language and therefore more accessible to de-agentivisation than German. Let us take a look at two literary examples in which German passive constructions are translated into Albanian using active structures:

(4) […] dikush kiste shpifur kundër Jozef K, sepse një mëngjes **atë** _AKKUSATIV_ **e**
     arrestuan _AKTIV_
     (Kafka, Procesi, 2014, p. 15)
     Someone must have slandered Josef K., because [they] arrested him one morning

In the original, Kafka chose to use a passive form (*wurde verhaftet* "was arrested") with a decentred agent. The translation makes use of a subject-decentred active clause: the agentive subject is missing overtly but is kept in mind – the crucial point is that it is thematicised anonymously. Neither the original text or the translation says who arrested Josef K.

(5) Kur vajzën _AKKUSATIV_ e **sollën** _AKTIV_ në shtëpi […]
     (Zweig, Padurimi i zemrës, 1997, p. 52)
     by the time Edith was brought home, with hardly any noticeable improvement in her
     condition
     (Zweig, Ungeduld des Herzens, 2009, p. 43)

In (5) the translation and original text are not congruent either. The passive clause is translated with an active clause. Were the Albanian translation to be translated back into German, it would have to be done as follows: "Als sie das Mädchen nach Hause brachten". The subject is also missing in (5) but it is not unknown: it is clear from the context and mentioning it would be redundant. In Albanian the principle of economy can also work in active clauses because here (alongside passive clauses) they show reduced valency. In the original and in the translation, the same action is realised in different manners using different forms. For the non-verbalised agent in Albanian active clauses, the same is true as Myhill (1997, p. 815) observed for English *they* constructions: "although we can say that the 3rd person plural agents are always vague, they are in some sense even more vague when the passive rather than vague *they* is not used."

In contrast to the processual passive, the statal passive in both languages is not particularly strongly grammaticalized and can be identical in form to copula structures (Maienborn 2007; Welke 2007), which makes it difficult to draw a clear line between the two uses. In Albanian the fact that statal passives are identical in form to processual passives makes it even more difficult because the *to be* verb is ambiguous in Albanian, with some overlap with the meaning of the *to get* verb. The same problem occurs in both languages: The unclear status of what follows the verb, which affects the classification of the verb as a copula or auxiliary verb. A statal passive cannot be ruled out in either German or Albanian, however. If one assumes that both languages have a statal passive, these forms must, in principle also form processual passives. In Albanian adjectival articles in present clauses (*dritarja është **e hapur***, "das Fenster ist geöffnet") appear to provide evidence for a statal passive.

References

Agalliu, Fatmir/Angoni, Engjëll/Demiraj, Shaban (1995): Grammatika e gjuhës shqipe. Vëllimi 1. Morfologjia. Tiranë: Akademie e Shkencave e Republikës së Shqipërisë.

Ágel, Vilmos (2017): Grammatische Textanalyse. Textglieder, Satzglieder, Wortgruppenglieder. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

Buchholz, Oda/Fiedler, Wilfried (1987): Albanische Grammatik. Leipzig: Enzyklopädie.

Eggs, Frederike (2017): „Darf *man* fragen, wie alt Sie eigentlich sind?" Zu einigen ungewöhnlichen Formen der Selbst- und der Fremdreferenz und ihren Funktionen. In: Ekinci, Yüksel/Montanari, Elke/Selmani, Lirim (eds.): Grammatik und Variation. Festschrift für Ludger Hoffmann zum 65. Geburtstag. Heidelberg: Synchron, pp. 67–81.

Eroms, Hans Werner (2000): Syntax der deutschen Sprache. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.

Kafka, Franz (2005): Der Prozeß. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Maienborn, Claudia (2007): Das Zustandspassiv. Grammatische Einordnung – Bildungsbeschränkung – Interpretationsspielraum. In: Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik 35, 1–2, pp. 83–114.

Myhill, John (1997): Toward a functional typology of agent defocusing. In: Linguistics 35, 5, pp. 799–844.

Pani, Pandeli (1997): Die Diathesen im Albanischen und ihre indogermanischen Grundlagen. (= Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen 31). Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Prifti, Ergys (2009): Përqasje midis diatezave pësore në gjuhën shqipe dhe gjermane. Dissertation. Universität Tirana.

Primus, Beatrice (2011): Das unpersönliche Passiv – Ein Fall für die Konstruktionsgrammatik? In: Engelberg, Stefan/Holler, Anke/Proost, Kristel (eds.): Sprachliches Wissen zwischen Lexikon und Grammatik. (= Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Sprache 2010). Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 285–313.

Schoenthal, Gisela (1976): Das Passiv in der deutschen Standardsprache. Darstellung in der neueren Grammatiktheorie und Verwendung in Texten gesprochener Sprache. (= Heutiges Deutsch. Reihe 1. Linguistische Grundlagen 7). München: Hueber.

Welke, Klaus (2007): Das Zustandspassiv. Pragmatische Beschränkungen und Regelkonflikte. In: Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik 35, 1–2, pp. 115–145.

Welke, Klaus (2012): Valenz und Konstruktion: Das Passiv im Deutschen. In: Fischer, Klaus/Mollica, Fabio (eds.): Valenz, Konstruktion und Deutsch als Fremdsprache. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, pp. 47–90.

Zifonun, Gisela/Hoffmann, Ludger/Strecker, Bruno (1997): Grammatik der deutschen Sprache. (= Schriften des Instituts für deutsche Sprache 7). Berlin/New York: De Gruyter.

Zweig, Stefan (1997): Padurimi i zemrës. Translated into Albanian by Jorgji Doksani. Berat: Uegen.

Zweig, Stefan (2009): Ungeduld des Herzens. Berlin: Fischer.