

# The Passives of German in an RRG Account

Mona Nishizaki

University of Genoa, Italy

E-mail: monanishizaki@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The German language distinguishes between three major forms of passive. They are differentiated according to the auxiliary used to form the passive. In that manner the different types of passive are termed “werden-passive” “sein-passive,” and “bekommen-passive.” This paper will show the complexity and the link between the syntax and semantic elements of the German passive in Role and Reference account and present two different constructional schemas. An analysis of the data has shown that the three passives express differences in terms of valency, case marking, and undergoer selection. Semantically, there are differences in perspective between the three passives. While the sein-passive expresses a state, the werden-passive expresses a process, and the bekommen-passive allows for marked undergoer selection. All three passives allow to put the focus on different parts of the sentence.

**Keywords:** Sein-passive, Werden-passive, Bekommen-passive, Role and reference grammar

## 1. Introductory Remarks

The German passive poses an interesting phenomenon, whose complexity is only partially accounted for in many grammars. This paper will show the complexity and the link between the syntax and semantic elements of the German passive in Role and Reference account and present two different constructional schemas. Distinguishing between three different forms of passive according to the auxiliary used, I attempt to give a description of general characteristics of those forms. In doing so, I will examine aspects of valency, operators, logical structure and undergoer selection. This paper also illustrates how the different passives allow us to emphasize different parts of the sentence.

Firstly, I will first describe all individual forms separately. The first two forms, *werden* – Passiv and *sein* – Passiv, are mainly distinguished in terms of perspective expressed in the auxiliary as well as the auxiliary's logical structure (LS). Following, I will describe the *bekommen* – Passiv, also addressing some of the problems related to this construction. I will not discuss in detail whether or not this is a passive form, as it is not the focus of my paper. I

will treat this as an additional passive form, referencing Diedrichsen (2004, 2008, 2012). The main focus of this paper remains the representation of the three different passives in an RRG framework.

In a German active sentence, the subject (actor) is assigned nominative case, the direct object (undergoer) is assigned accusative case, and the indirect object is assigned dative case. When forming a passive, generally speaking, it is the accusative object of the active sentence, the undergoer, that is linked to subject and assigned nominative case. The actor can be added as an adjunct prepositional phrase (Durrel, 2002: 307).

In the case of three argument constructions, such as ditransitive verbs, the theme as well as the recipient can be chosen as undergoer of the passive sentence, depending on which form of passive is used. Ditransitive verbs pose a problem in RRG in so far that many language, including German and English, allow to the recipient as well as the theme of a sentence to be the undergoer of a sentence. In English, for example, ditransitive verbs can either be expressed through a double-object construction (Pat gave Kim the book) or through a prepositional dative construction (Pat gave the book to Kim). According to the actor undergoer hierarchy in RRG, the second structure is the default or unmarked choice, while the first sentence is the marked undergoer choice. The problem with this analysis, as Haspelmath (2008) points out, is that it is not clear why one pattern should be privileged over another. Referring back to the German passive, this is interesting as a recipient undergoer selection is only possible with one of the three passives discussed (*bekommen*) while the other two passives only allow for a theme undergoer.

## 2. *Werden*-passive

The *werden*-passive, just like the other forms, is named from the auxiliary used to form it: *werden* “to become”. It is by far the most commonly used passive (Durrel et al., 2002:106), so that some grammars will only describe this form of passive and omit others (Dreyer, 2001; Reimann, 1997). This passive can be formed using intransitive, as seen in the example (1), transitive, as seen in the example (2), and ditransitive verbs, as seen in the example (6).

(1) Es wird ge-schlafen

It is.being-PRS.3Sg sleep-PTCP

“Someone sleeps”

(2) Das Buch wird gelesen

The bookNOM is.being-PRS.3Sg readPTCP

“The book is being read”

When used with an intransitive verb, it acquires impersonal meaning as *es* “it” is used as a placeholder in the initial position. Additionally, temporal and spatial adverbs such as *heute* “today” or *hier* “here” may appear in that position as shown in example (3) (Durrel et al., 2002:105).

- (3) Hier wird von den Kindern ge-gessen  
 Here is.being-PRS.3Sg by the childrenDAT eat-PTCP

“The children eat here”

It is possible to add the subject of the active sentence in an adjunct prepositional phrase (PP) as seen in the example (3) and (4). It should be noted that in example (3), the verb *essen* “to eat” can also be used transitively.

- (4) Der Frosch wird von der Schlange ge-fressen  
 The frogNOM is.being (Note 1) -PRS-3Sg by the snakeDAT eat-PTCP

“The frog is being eaten by the snake”

- (5) Das Essen wird mir von meiner  
 The foodNOM is.beingPRS.3Sg meDAT by my-POSS

Mutter serviert”

momDAT serve-PTCP

“The food is being served to me by my mom”

When used with transitive and ditransitive verbs, such as example (5), the passive has at least one, possibly two core arguments, and the actor can appear as an adjunct PP in the periphery. In the majority of cases, one core argument is the Privileged Syntactic Argument (PSA) and is assigned nominative case. The second core argument is a NMR and is assigned dative case in active and passive sentences.

Some verbs in German do not take an accusative object, but instead a genitive object such as *gedenken* “commemorate.” In this case, the genitive object of the active sentence may take the sentence initial position in the passive sentence, yet the case marking does not change. Therefore, in sentences such as example (7) and (8), we have a single argument marked as genitive. Constructions using *es*, *hier*, *heute* and other temporal and spatial adverbs in the sentence initial position are possible such as example (9). In those cases, the word order changes, but not the case marking.

- (7) Ich gedenke der Toten  
 INOM commemorate-PRS.1Sg the deadGEN

“I commemorate the dead”

- (8) Der Toten wird gedacht  
 The deadGEN is.being-PRS.3Sg commemorate-PTCP

“The dead are being commemorated”

- (9) Hier wird der Toten gedacht  
 Here is.being-PRS.3Sg the deadGEN commemorate-PTCP

“Here, the dead are commemorated”

Additionally, there are a few verbs that require a dative object in the active sentence as a second direct core argument such as *helfen* “to help” (examples (10) and (11)). Again, the case marking does not change for that second direct core argument. The placeholder *es* can be put in the sentence initial position with verbs that take dative objects as Reimann (1999:61) points out.

- (10) Ich helfe dem Kind  
 INOM help-PRS.1Sg the childDAT

“I help the child”

- (11) Dem Kind wird geholfen  
 The childDAT is.being-PRS.3Sg help-PTCP

“Someone is helping the child”

Regarding the operators, aspect (ASP), tense (TNS), and illocutionary force (IF) are all realized in the auxiliary (Figure 1).

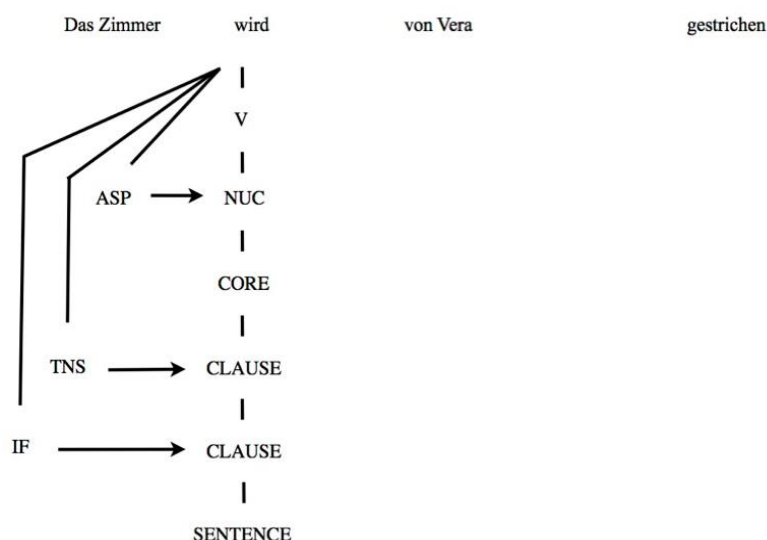


Figure 1. Representation of modifiers for a *werden*-passive sentence

I would like to point out ASP which is very important in this case. Unlike English, German does not mark progressive aspect by inflection of the verb. Rather, German uses temporal adverbs such as *jetzt* “now”, *gerade* “now”, *in diesem Moment* “in this moment.” In other cases, a progressive aspect is used due to the meaning of the verb, which is the case on this occasion as pointed out by Durrel (2002:206). In its inherent meaning, the verb *werden* “to

become” means the process of something turning into something else, as in example (12).

- (12) “Ich werde verrückt”  
 INOM become-PRS.1Sg crazyADJ  
 “I turn crazy”

In its initial state, the person is not crazy. By using the verb, *werden* he or she describes his or her progression into turning crazy. Therefore, this auxiliary always expresses a *progressive aspect*.

This is expressed more clearly when looking at the semantics of the verb. According to the verb classes (Van Valin, 2005), *werden* is an accomplishment. Consequently, *werden* has the following logical structure:

- (13) LS: BECOME **predicate** (x) or (x,y).

However, the logical structure of the actual passive sentences can differ according to the predicate. Determined by the past participle used in the passive, the characteristics [ $\pm$ dynamic], [ $\pm$ elic], and [ $\pm$ punctual] can change as in example (14) and example (15). Due to its progressive perspective and the inherent understanding of *werden* as a process of some sort, passives with this auxiliary are never [+static].

- (14) Das Haus wird ab- ge-rissen  
 The houseNOM is.being-PRS.3Sg downADJ tear-PTCP  
 “The house is being torn down”  
 LS: **do**(x, [destroy(x)]) CAUSE **not-exist**(Haus)

- (15) Das Auto wird ge-wasch-en  
 The carNOM is.being-PRS.3Sg wash-PTCP  
 “The car is being washed”  
 LS: **do**(x, [wash(x, Auto)])

It would be interesting to see for future research if examples for every verb class can be found and which verb classes occur most frequently. Figure 2 shows the syntax to semantics linking for example (4).

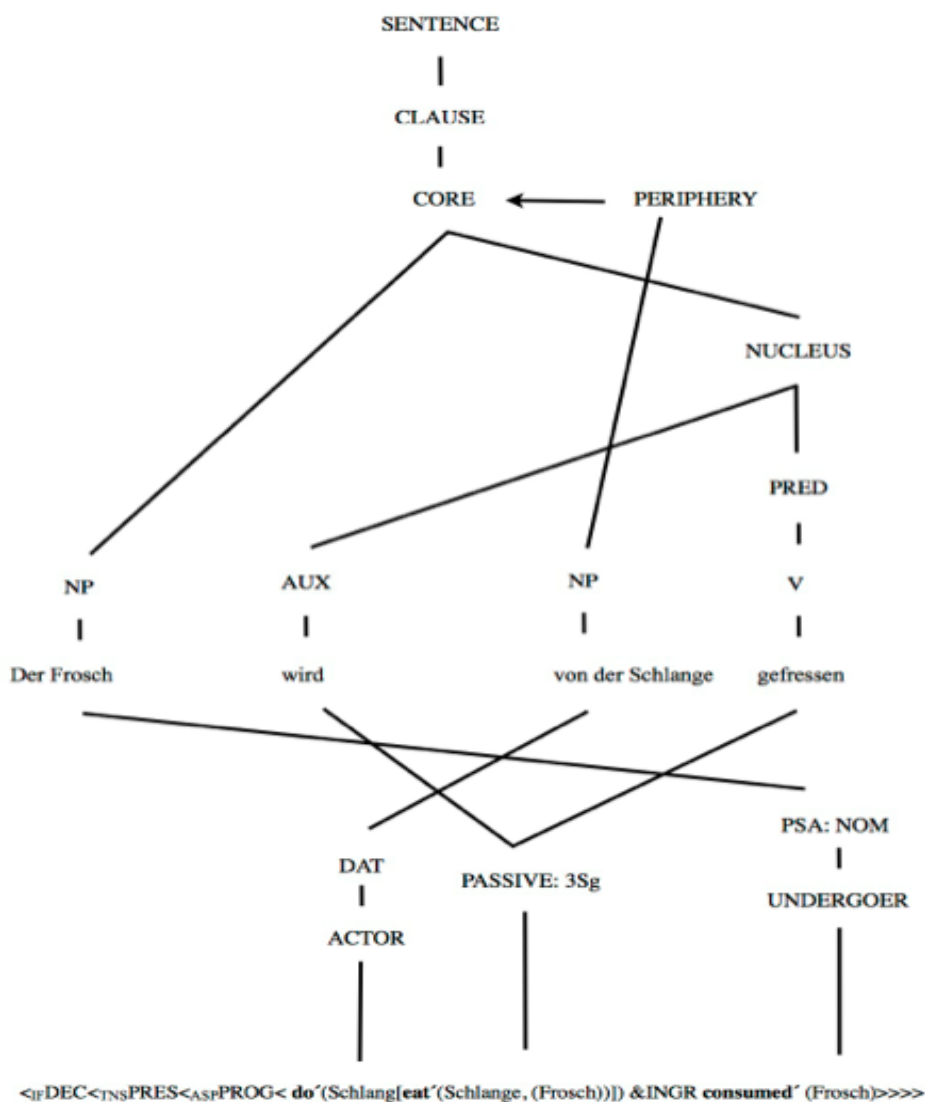


Figure 2. Representation of syntax to semantics linking of a *werden*-passive sentence

At this point, I will take a closer look at the actor. As described in Van Valin (2005:116), it can either be omitted or added as an oblique element, an adjunct PP in the periphery. Adding the actor is far more likely with the *werden*- Passiv than it is with this passive. Unlike English, German has a number of acceptable prepositions to add the actor (Brinker, 1971: 85ff.). The most commonly used are *von* “from”, *durch* “through”, and *mit* “with”.

- (16) Die Zeichnung ist von einem Kind an-ge-fertigt  
 The drawingNOM is-PRS.3Sg by a childDAT produce-PTCP  
 “The drawing is produced by a child”

- (17) Er wurde durch einen Stein ge-t-ötet  
 HeNOM was-PST.3Sg through a stoneACC kill-PTCP  
 “He was killed through a stone”

As seen in example (16), *von* indicates an agent-like argument. It is the child that made the drawing. In example (17), however, the stone is not an active, agent-like action, but rather a means through which an action, the killing, is carried out. *Mit*, such as example (18) is followed by an instrument with which an action is carried out (Durrel et al., 2002:105; Brinker, 1971:42). In other words, *von* expresses a direct causal relationship, whereas the causal relationship with *mit* and *durch* is indirect. The issue of which preposition is used to add the actor is critical as it determines case marking. *Von* and *mit* are followed by the dative case, while *durch* is followed by the accusative case (Reiman, 1997:61).

- (18) Er wurde mit dem Schwert erschlagen  
 He was-PST.3Sg with the swordDAT slay-PTCP  
 “He was slain by the sword”

### 3. *Sein-* passive

Another form of passive is the *sein*-passive, which uses *sein* (to be) as an auxiliary. Unlike the former passive, this one cannot be formed with intransitive verbs but only with transitive and ditransitive ones. There is at least one core argument; the actor can be added as an adjunct PP. Case assignment for all core arguments follows the same rules as with the *werden*-passive.

There are cases in which an *es* occurs in the sentence initial position of a *sein*-Passiv sentence as seen in example (19).

- (19) Es ist angerichtet  
 ItPRN is-PRS.3Sg serve-PTCP  
 “It is served”

This is different than a placeholder *es*, as has been described for the *werden*-passive, because in this case it is the third person singular personal pronoun. It is referential to for example *Das Essen* “the food” unlike a placeholder. So, *es* is the undergoer and thus PSA in this sentence.

It has to be noted at this point that the status of this passive has been discussed and questioned for many decades among German linguists (Lenz, 1993; Maienborn, 2007; Litvinov, & Nedjalkov, 1988). The main issue is the categorization of the past participle as either having a verbal function or an adjective function (Maienborn, 2007). Grammarians have argued for the verbal interpretation, either as its own genus verbi (Lenz, 1993) or as a different category altogether, namely the *Resultativum* (Litvinov, & Nedjalkov, 1988). Recent debate (Kratzer, 1994; Maieborn, 2007, Rapp, 998) however, has favored an adjective-copula reading. That means a sentence, such as example (20) could be interpreted in two ways, either as a verb+copula construction or a auxiliary+ past participle construction:

- (20) Die Zeichnung ist von einem Kind an-ge-fertigt  
 The drawingNOM is-PRS.3Sg by a childDAT produce-PTCP

“The drawing is produced by a child”

Advocates of the second reading argue that main problems with verbal interpretation is the fact that these past participles can form comparatives, such as example (21) or can take the prefix *un* “un-“, such as example (22). Both processes are only possible for adjectives.

- (21) Die Region ist noch gefährdeter  
 The regionNOM is-PRS.3Sg even endanger-COMP

“The region is even more endangered”

- (22) Das Bett ist ungemacht  
 The bedNOM is-PRS.3Sg un-makePTC

“The bed is unmade”

However, there are also problem with the adjective-copula reading i.e. the use of certain modifiers, for example the actor as in example (16), which are not possible with genuine adjectives (Maienborn, 2006). This would be an interesting problem to discuss in an RRG account but is beyond the scope of this paper. In this paper, these constructions are treated as a passive.

The different auxiliary used here leads to the expression of a different perspective. The *werden*- passive expresses a progressive perspective, whereas the *sein*- Passiv expresses a state perspective. Actions expressed by a *sein*-passive are not in progress but are completed. In that manner, the *Essential German Grammar* (2002) states that only verbs in which a “tangible or visible result” of some sort is expressed can form a passive using “sein” (Durrel et al, 2002:106). *Sein* as such is a *state* verb, that is, in its inherent meaning it expresses [+state] (Durrel et al., 2002: 307; Schenke et al., 2012: 155). Accordingly, its LS is expressed as follows:

- (23) LS: **be'** (x, [**predicate'**]).

The most fundamental distinction between verbs is whether they are state or activity predicates. All other verb classes are derived from those two. Hence, while *werden* allows for different logical structures that all have the characteristic [-state] in common, this passive can only be [+state], since this is a characteristic of the auxiliary. Therefore, *sein*- Passiv is often referred to as *Zustandspassiv* (Drosdowski, 1977-1993:185). In English, one might call it a state passive as opposed to the process passive.

This different perspective is further supported by the fact that oftentimes, a *sein*-passive can be traced back to the perfect passive of a *werden*-passive sentence, as is shown in figure 3. This is illustrated in the examples (24)-(26) show the development of a *sein* – Passiv from the present perfect of a *werden* – Passiv. All three sentences describe a scenario that is related to a table being set, but they concentrate on different aspects. Example (24) describes a scenario in which the table setting is in process, demonstrated by the use of the auxiliary *werden* in the present. In the perfect passive such as example (25), the sentence describes a scenario in



which the table has been set, which means the action is no longer in process but completed. However, the reading of the sentence includes the action of setting the table, putting focus on the end state but also the action. Example (26) describes the same scenario as example (25), except the focus lies solely on the end state. Naturally, one knows that in order for a table to be set, someone must have done it. This, however, is not the focus of a *sein* – Passiv sentence but the resulting state. Thus, these two passives allow us to focus on different perspectives of the action described in the predicate. As stated before, adding an actor with the the *sein* – Passiv is a lot less likely, which can at least partially be explained by the focus on the end state rather than on the process. Fig. 3 illustrates the differences once more. Examples (24) and (25) express the same, so they have the same logical structure. Omitting the past participle of *werden* as in example (26), only part of the meaning is expressed.

(24) Der Tisch wird ge-deckt

The tableNOM is.being-PRS.3Sg set-PTCP

“The table is being set”

LS: **do'** (x, [lay'] (x, Tisch)) CAUSE **be** (x, Tisch [**laid** ])

(25) Der Tisch ist ge-deckt worden

The tableNOM is-PRS.3Sg set-PTCP become-PTCP

“The table has been set”

LS: **do'** (x, [lay'] (x, Tisch)) CAUSE **be** (x, Tisch [**laid** ])

(26) Der Tisch ist ge-deckt

The tableNOM is-PRS.3Sg set-PTCP

“The table is set”

LS: **be** (x, Tisch [**laid** ])

## SYNTAX

Template(s): cf. Van Valin 2005:131 PSA: Accusative construction: highest ranking core argument in terms of: Privileged syntactic argument selection hierarchy (Van Valin 2005:100); only macrorole argument can be PSA, Variable [ $\pm$ pragmatic influence]

Linking: PSA modulation voice: permits an argument other than the default argument in terms of modulation

Privileged syntactic argument selection hierarchy (Van Valin 2005:100); voice: omitted or in peripheral *von, durch, mit* -PP

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**MORPHOLOGY**

Verb: past participle

Auxiliary: *sein, werden*

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**SEMANTICS**PSA is not instigator of state of affairs but is affected by it (default)

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**PRAGMATICS**Illocutionary Force: unspecified Focus structure: no restrictions, PSA=topic (default)

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Figure 3. Constructional schema for *sein* and *werden*-passive**4. *Bekommen* – Passiv**

Another possibility to form a passive in German is using the auxiliary *bekommen* (get/receive). As mentioned before, this construction is not universally seen as an additional passive. Rather, most call this “grammaticalization – in – progress” (for a detailed account of this matter see Diedrichsen 2004, 2008, 2012). The author argues this construction is developing towards a passive. So, it is treated as an additional passive in this paper (Diedrichsen, 2004: 67). Compared to the other two passives, a rather restricted number of verbs can be used with *bekommen*- Passiv. First, they have to be ditransitive. Secondly, as a three place predicate they require a recipient, a theme and an actor (Ziering et al., n.d.:1639).

A difference between this passive and the other two lies in the selection of arguments. With the previously mentioned forms of *werden*- Passiv and *sein*- Passiv, it is usually the accusative object of the active sentence that gets linked to subject in the passive sentence. With this construction, the dative object of the active sentence gets promoted to subject in the passive sentence. Here, it is the dative object of ditransitive verbs, the recipient of an action, that is chosen as undergoer and linked to subject as in example (23) and (24). Regarding case assignment of the passive sentence, this construction behaves just like the other two; the subject is assigned nominative case, the second core argument is assigned accusative case, and the actor can be added in the periphery as an adjunct PP.

In terms of case marking, it has been noted that a passive takes the accusative object of a sentence as subject for the passive sentence (Drosdowski, 1977-1993, Zierig et al., n.d.). In reference to RRG, this problem is formulated in terms of the actor-undergoer hierarchy as seen in Figure 4.

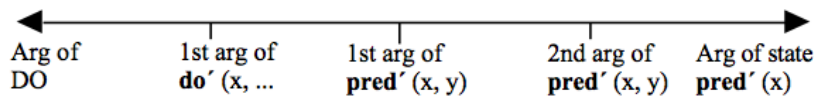


Figure 4. Actor-undergoer hierarchy (Van Valin 2005)

Generally, the right most argument is chosen as default undergoer, and it is the PSA of the passive sentence (Van Valin, 2005:116). That is, only the theme can be chosen as undergoer. as in example (27).

- (27) Den Gästen wird eine Flasche Wein  
 The guestsDAT get-PRS.3Pl a bottle NOM wine  
 servier-t  
 serve-PTCP  
 “The guests are served a bottle of wine”

- (28) Die Gäste bekommen eine Flasche Wein  
 The guestsNOM get-PRS.3Pl a bottle ACC wine  
 servier-t  
 servePTCP  
 “The guests are served a bottle of wine”

In example (28), however, the second right most argument is chosen as undergoer, as in example, which presents a case of variable or marked undergoer selection following Diedrichsen (2004). It is appropriate to question whether or not the subject is also the PSA of the sentence. Van Valin (2005:108) states that the PSA as the highest ranking macrorole is the controller of the finite verb agreement. The highest ranking macrorole is assigned nominative case. According to that, this construction meets the requirements of a passive. Diedrichsen also concludes that the recipient as undergoer has all features of a PSA (Diedrichsen, 2004: 57).

Another difference is that *bekommen*- Passiv is not an auxiliary, but a full lexeme, meaning that someone receives something (Diedrichsen, 2004:51f.). There are also uses of the *bekommen*-passive where the ‘reception’ semantics of *bekommen* is extended, see Diedrichsen 2008, 2012.

- (29)LS: **do'**(x, [**give'** (x, (y))]) CAUSE **have'**(x,y).

Thus, the question is whether the verb here is used as a lexeme or as an auxiliary. Due to its inherent meaning, the use of *bekommen* always leads to a recipient reading in the passive sentence. This does not necessarily mean the reception of an actual object as in example (30), it may also mean the reception of an action as in example (31). Hence, this passive always

“expresses the event of receiving from the perspective of the recipient” (Diedrichsen, 2004:52). When leaving out the past participle, a sentence using *bekommen*- Passiv would still make sense and express said event of receiving. The past participle then adds more detail about the event of receiving. Through the use of *bekommen*, the recipient is selected as undergoer, the exact action then is coded in the verb, the PTCP (Diedrichsen, 2004:57). Examples (30) and (31) both express the event of receiving from the perspective of *ich*. In example (31), we learn more details about the circumstances under which *ich* received the hat:

- (30) Ich bekam einen Hut  
 INOM receive-PST.1Sg a hatACC  
 “I received a hat”/“I got a hat”
- (31) Ich bekam einen Hut von meinem Freund  
 INOM getPST.1Sg a hatACC from my friendDAT  
 geschick-t  
 send-PTCP  
 “I was sent a hat by my friend”

This passive needs three arguments, the theme, as a second non-macrorole core argument is marked as accusative. This does not have to be an actual object; the undergoer may also be the recipient of a certain action as in example (31).

- (31) Ich bekomme einen Vortrag ge-halten  
 INOM get-PRS1.Sg. a lectureACC holdPTCP  
 “I am being lectured”

This sentence describes a situation where someone is being lectured. He or she is not handed a lecture, rather the lecture is addressed at him or her. Furthermore, sentences such as example (32) are possible. In this example, an event of taking something away is expressed as opposed to an event of receiving, leading to the following logical structure

- (32)LS:  $\text{do}'(x, [\text{take}'(x, (\text{Buch}))])$  CAUSE **not-have'**(Er, Buch).

This reading results from the meaning of the predicate. Although *bekommen*- Passiv contributes to our understanding of these sentences by its inherent meaning, in this case, we only know that something is taken away by the meaning of the PTSP. When leaving out the PTSP, the sentence would mean someone receives a book, which would infer the opposite meaning of *bekommen*. Thus, one might argue that while *bekommen* can be used as a full lexeme, in the case of the *bekommen* – Passiv it is used as an auxiliary.

- (33) Er bekam das Buch weg- genommen  
 HeNOM get-PST.3Sg the bookACC away take-PTCP

“The book was taken away from him”

Diedrichsen (2004) states that if we accept this construction as a third passive that arose from the need to select the recipient as undergoer, the question arises, why we do not use the already existing *werden* – Passiv as it can express the same meaning. Example 24 and 25 carry the same meaning, that is, they have the same logical structure. The only difference between the two is in the selection of the y argument, the undergoer. LS example (34) and (35).

(34)LS: [**do** (x)] CAUSE BECOME [**have** (die G äste, Wein)]

(35)LS [**do** (x)] CAUSE BECOME [**have** (Wein, die G äste)].

By selecting the recipient as undergoer, we are able to present this argument as the most affected by the action, assigning NMR status to the other direct core argument. Using *werden*, in contrast, highlights the other direct core argument as the most affected, assigning NMR status to the recipient. Example (31) can be said to say the same as example (36).

(36) Mir wird ein Vortrag ge-halten  
 MeDAT is.being-PRS.3Sg a lectureNOM hold-PTCP

“I am given a lecture”

As mentioned before, there are transitive verbs in German that take dative objects such as *helfen*. A *bekommen* – Passiv allows for the dative coded argument to become the PSA of the passive sentence.

(37) Er bekam ge-holfen  
 HeNOM get-PST.3Sg help-PTCP

“He was helped”

This is also possible with for example the *haben*-passive, but it is more restricted than the *bekommen*-passive (Diedrichsen, 2004:61).

As a native speaker of German, there is a minimal difference in how I would understand examples (31) and (36). Example (36) may either mean someone is being presented an informative lecture or someone is being lectured e.g. by a parent. On the other hand, I would understand example (31) only as the someone is being lectured in the negative sense. The difference between *werden* and *bekommen* is that the latter allows us to put the recipient, the argument to which the action is carried out, in the PSA position (Diewald, 1997:40). While the resulting difference in meaning may be small, it is notable just like the difference between the *sein* – passive and *werden* – passive. Using *werden* in a passive puts the focus on the process, while the use of *sein* allows us to focus on the resulting state. Using *werden* puts focus on the patient, while the use of *bekommen* allows us to focus on the recipient.

Accordingly, we have three major forms of the German passive. While expressing similar meanings, the different auxiliaries allow us to focus on different things such as which

argument to choose for the undergoer and whether to emphasize the process or the resulting state. This does not settle the discussion regarding if the *bekommen* – passive should be classified as a passive or not. Yet, it is my opinion that considering the problem in reference to all passive forms may aid in understanding why there are instances in which we prefer a passive form rather than the plain passive. After all, a passive sentence means the same as the corresponding active sentence, differing only in form (Eisenberg, 1998a:24). Using the passive allows us to focus more on the action than on the actor, which is a feature of voice in general (Schenke et al., 2012:154; Reimann, 1999:61).

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## SYNTAX

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## MORPHOLOGY

Verb: past participle

Auxiliary: *bekommen*

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## SEMANTICS

PSA is not instigator of state of affairs but is affected by it (default)

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## PRAGMATICS

Illocutionary Force: unspecified Focus structure: no restrictions, PSA=topic (default)

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Figure 5. Constructional schema for *bekommen* -passive

## 5. Conclusion

This paper serves to give a Role and Reference Grammar Account of the German passives. The framework has proved useful in describing the characteristics of the different passives in German. I have provided an account of three different passives in German, distinguishing them based on the auxiliary used. For each passive I described the syntax to semantics linking, specifically focussing on the semantic features. I have emphasized the differences in meaning between those three passives, illustrating the different perspectives expressed in the *sein*-passive vs. the *werden*-passive. Passives formed with *sein* are always stative, highlighting the result of an action. Passives formed with *werden* describe a process, due to the LS of

*werden*. The *bekommen*-passive, as a third form, generally implies a receptive reading of the sentence and allows to link the dative coded argument to subject in the passive sentence. For each of the passives, I have provided a constructional schema.

However, voice in German is complex and multi-layered. Though I have pointed out ongoing discussion and problems, it is beyond the scope of this paper to address all of them in detail. Thus, there is need for future research, especially investigating the status of dative in German passives. There are further issues relating to the *bekommen*-passive, which have been discussed by Diedrichsen (2004, 2008). There is a greater need for a detailed description and discussion of the *sein*-passive in an RRG account, which could greatly contribute to an ongoing discussion about the status of these constructions (cf. Maienborn 2007). This paper is only a broad account, focussing on specific features, comparing three major passive forms. I do not claim completeness. A number of further passive or passive-like constructions, as well as exceptions and further details have not been dealt with here. There are for example, the question of middles, or other passive-like constructions using the PTCP, passive with modal verbs, passives with infinitives.

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## Note

Note 1. *werden* is translated with “is being” in order to emphasize the progressive perspective. A translation with “become” would also be possible.

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