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VOLITIONAL AND NON-VOLITIONAL PASSIVES IN ENGLISH:
How do They Work?

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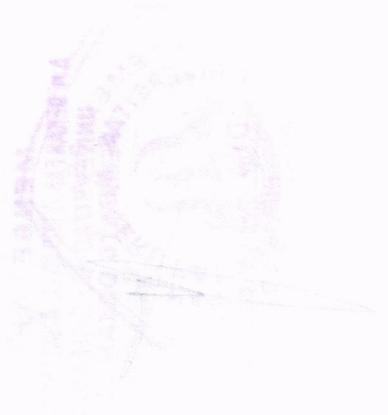
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VOLITIONAL AND NON-VOLITIONAL PASSIVES IN ENGLISH:
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Abstract

As an accusative language, English belongs to languages which clearly assign the dichotomy of active and passive voice. Typologically, English has periphrastic or analytic passivization; passivization by means of a copular verb plus the "past participle" (a patient nominalization) of the underlying active construction. Cross-linguistic studies on passivization indicate that different languages circumscribe passivizable verbs differently according to the notion of activities. The phenomena of volitionality in English passives may have different grammatical and semantic characteristics from those in bahasa Indonesia and/or in Minangkabaunese, for example. Both bahasa Indonesia and Minangkabaunese have morphological passivization and different morphological markers can cause different volitionality in the passive constructions. This paper discusses the phenomena of volitional and non-volitional passives in English based on the theories of linguistic typology. In order to have cross-linguistic comparisons, the discussion is served by comparing them with the volitionality cases of passives in bahasa Indonesia and those of Minangkabaunese. The comparative discussion is also aimed to show that passivization and phenomena of passives, particularly on volitionality, are various cross-linguistically.

Key wods/phrases: *nominative-accusative, passivization, passive, voice, volitionality, linguistic typology, English*

A. Introduction

The case that language has four integrated aspects; form, meaning, function, and value, has been a basic agreement among linguists. It is believed that those aspects work systematically in such a way that the language is able to capsulate and communicate messages and certain information. Accordingly, the linguistic studies may be various and are in broad areas as language has multifunction. Linguists should be aware of complicated and systematic matters found in human language in order that linguistic studies may describe and explore the nature of language. In relation to these, linguists and others who are interested in language are in right position to the aspects of language based on particular linguistic theories scientifically.

Describing linguistic phenomena is one of the central goals in linguistics, and for many linguists, it is their primary goal. Linguistic description is vitally important for two reasons: (i) language is a major part of common human heritage; and (ii) languages are vanishing as their last speakers die or they are supplanted by a socio-culturally dominant

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language, just as plant and animal species are becoming extinct (van Valin, Jr., and Lapolla, 2002:3). The linguistic studies which more focus on form or grammatical structures of language may be regarded as the fundamental one since the other aspects must be based on it. However, it does not mean that language form or grammatical structures are all things about language.

The studies on *voice* (=*diathesis*) phenomena have been becoming important and challenging topics in grammatical and semantic fields. It is caused by the case that voice phenomena are linguistically seen as the grammatical-semantic interfaces. Shibatani (in Shibatani (ed.), 1988:1) informs that voice phenomena, especially the relationship between the active and the passive, have played important roles in the development of modern linguistics. Furthermore, the active-passive pair was a centerpiece of Chosky's transformational generative grammar, and it played an important role in motivating the concepts of deep structure and transformations, the twoo central devices of the theory. Shibatani adds that apart from the developments in formal syntax, voice phenomena have figured prominently in the field of linguistic typology, as well.

Formal studies, based on formal theories in grammar do not face serious problem in recognizing the voice forms, but typologists often faced considerable difficulty in recognizing and distinguishing deferent voice forms. One major area in which problems arose was in the ergative languages, in which the basic transitive clause resembles the passive form of English and other non-ergative languages in that the patient occurs in the unmarked absolutive (or nominative) case while the agent takes a special ergative case-marker. Whether or not the ergative construction should be identified as a passive construction has long been a controversial issue (Shibatani in Shibatani (ed.), 1988:1 – 2).

Typologically, clause construction in active voice (active clause) is grammatically assigned as the underlying form, while the passive one is the derived form in accusative languages. As an accusative language, English, of course, has active and passive constructions. Minangkabaunese, a local language spoken in West Sumatera, is another example of accusative language. It is also reported that in this language the dichotomy active-passive construction is also found (see Jufrizal, 2004, 2007). Although English and Minangkabaunese are typologically grouped into accusative language, but they do not have the same grammatical-semantic strategies in passivization. English has analytic

passives, but Minangkabaunese belongs to language which has morphological passives (see Payne, 2002; Jufrizal, 2008). Thus, passivization in English and Minangkabaunese works differently.

Different morphological-passive markers in Minangkabaunese (and so are in other languages which belong to morphological passives) may generate different volitionality of the passives. In Minangkabaunese, for example, prefix *di-* is the morphological marker for volitional passive, whilst *ta-* is that for non-volitional passive (Jufrizal, 2004, 2008; and see also Donohue, 1999; and Klamer, 1998 for similar cases of passivization in *Tukang Besi* and *Kambera*). In other case, volitionality English passive is not grammatically easy to be identified. Grammatical markers used in passivization do not give direct semantic information about volitionality of passives in English like those do in Minangkabaunese. Although English and Minangkabaunese are typologized as accusative languages (S = A, ≠ P), and they have clear dichotomy active-passive voice, but they have different grammatical strategies of passivization. In addition, it seems that the volitionality in English passive is hard to be identified than that of Minangkabaunese.

In accordance with volitonality in passives, it is important to explore and to describe the volitionality in English passive. The comprehensive and reasonable description about volitionality in English passive is not only valuable for linguistic studies, but also paractically needed in the teaching-learning of English itself. Theoretically, typological analysis of passives, especially on volitionality in English and the comparison with that of bahasa Indonesia and/or of Minangkabaunese may give valuable data and information on passives cross-linguistically. It is believed that the typological analysis and discussion presented in this paper related to volitional and non-volitional passives in English and their comparison with those in Minangkabaunese and in bahasa Indonesia are meaningful for theoretical and practical needs. The main point discussed in this paper is the volitionality phenomena in English passive. Its comparison with those of bahasa Indonesia and of Minangkabaunese is just to have slightly cross-linguistic discussion in order to support the typological analysis.

B. Brief Review of Related Theories
1. Voice in Linguistic Typology

Historically, the term *voice* (Latin *vox* 'sound') was originally used by Roman in two distinguishable, but related, senses: (i) in the sense of 'sound', especially of the 'sounds pronounced by the vibration of the vocal cords'; and (ii) of the 'form' of a word. Then, the term has developed a third sense: '*it refers to the active and passive 'forms' of verb*'. The traditional Greek term for *voice* as a category of the verb was *diathesis* ('state', 'disposition', 'function'). In this sense of term, some linguists prefer to use *diathesis* rather than *voice*. Today, voice and diathesis are used interchangeably; to refer to semantic-syntactic categories of verbal predicates which usually go to active-passive dichotomy. In addition to these two types of voice, the term middle voice is commonly used by linguists; the intermediate voice between the primary opposition of active and passive ones (Lyons, 1987:371 – 373).

According to Shibatani (see Shibatani (ed.), 1988:3), voice is to be understood as a mechanism that selects a grammatically prominent syntactic constituent – subject – from the underlying semantic functions (case or thematic roles) of a clause. A majority of languages provide a basic voice strategy. In similar ideas, Shibatani (in Kulikov and Vater (eds.), 1998:117 – 118) states that voice represents the meaning relationship between the (referent of the) subject and the action denoted by the verb. The most common oppositions of the voice is the dichotomy between active and passive. But one more additional category is frequently added, namely the middle voice. Based on Kruisinga's ideas, Shibatani explains that voice is the name for a verbal form according as it primarily expresses the action or state with regard to its subject, which may be represented as acting (active voice), undergoing (passive voice), or affected by its own action (reflexive [middle]voice). The fundamental opposition in grammatical meanings among the three major voice categories of active, passive, and middle is shown as follow.

(i) Active category   : action occurs under the subject's control;
(ii) Passive category   : action occurs not under the subject's control but under that of another entity apart from the subject;
(iii) Middle category   : action occurs under the subject's control and its development is confined within the sphere of the subject.

Voice phenomena have been studied seriously by almost all grammarians by means of various linguistic theories, including by typologists. Shibatani (in Shibatani (ed.), 1988:1 – 3) mentions that voice phenomena have figured prominently in the field of linguistic typology as well. Whereas in formal studies the problem of recognizing the voice forms was not an issue largely because they dealt with uncontroversial forms such as the passive forming English, typologists faced considerable difficulty in recognizing and distinguishing different voice forms. In addition to active, passive, and middle voice, other types of voice system are in the categories of ergative and antipassive. The active, passive, and middle voices are naturally found in accusative languages; the active clause is the underlying form and the passive one is the derived form. On the other side, in ergative languages, clauses in ergative voice are the underlying forms while the derived forms are those in antipassive voice (see Artawa, 2004; Jufrizal, 2007, 2008).

As the voice phenomena have been the crucial issues in linguistic typology, typologists are in serious works to study active, passive, ergative, and antipassive voices. On this occasion, the discussion is focused on passive constructions only. Accordingly, typological passivization which generates passive constructions becomes the main subject matters of theoretical reviews. English has been known as an accusative language at morphological and syntactical levels. Minangkabaunese and also bahasa Indonesia (see Jufrizal, 2004, 2007) belong to accusative language at syntactical level. As the accusative languages, they have active and passive voices as the results of passivization grammatically and semantically.

2. Passivization and Types of Passives

In simple way, passivization can be said as the grammatical processes and strategies which generate passive constructions, particularly in accusative languages. In accusative languages, the basic strategy is to select an agent as a subject; and the active voice refers to the form resulting from this choice of agent as a subject. The active voice in accusative languages constitutes the unmarked voice. A large number of accusative languages provide a marked voice, which denies the agent as the subject role. The marked voice, which contrasts with the basic, is the passive one. Formally, in the prototypical active form, an agent is in the subject role, and in prototypical passive form a patient functions as a subject and an agent is syntactically unencoded. The typical active-passive

opposition shows a semantic contrast as well in that in the active form. In active form, the subject acts upon others or affects others, while in passive form, the subject is affected or undergoes some effects (Shibatani in Shibatani (ed.), 1988:3 – 4).

Song (2001:182), in similar ideas, states that the passive is typically found in languages with the nominative-accusative system. In the passive clause, the argument A of the active transitive clause is demoted to an adjunct (agent) phrase – very frequently marked by an oblique adposition or case – and the P of the active transitive clause is promoted to the S, with the effect that the total number of the core argument NPs is reduced from to in the original active transitive clause to one in the corresponding (derived) passive clause. According to Shibatani (see Kulikov and Vater (eds.), 1998:131), different languages circumscribe passivizable verbs differently according to the notion of activity. He explains that English includes in the group mental activities and even some mental states as well as the situation involving inanimate entities acting another. German, in other side, excludes non-volitional perception verbs.

In relation to passivization cross-linguistically, Tallerman (1998:180) states that although not all languages have a passive construction, it is extremely common in a wide variety of languages. Basic passive constructions in all languages are formed from transitive verbs. The hallmarks of the passive are first that the CORE arguments of a transitive verb – its subject and object – both change their grammatical relations, and second that the verb signals this by changes in its own form. Specifically, the object of the active sentence is promoted to be the subject of the passive sentence, whilst the subject of the active sentence is either removed altogether in the passive or else is simply demoted. To summarize, the prototypical passive construction has the following properties cross-linguistically (see also Payne, 2002:204 – 209). The passive construction:

(a) applies to a transitive clause (the active clause) and forms an intransitive clause;
(b) object promoted > subject;
(c) former subject demoted > oblique argument, or is deleted;
(d) changes occur in the morphology (=form) of the verb to signal passivization.

Based on the ideas given by experts such as Comrie, Givon, and Shibatani, Payne (2002:204- 209) states that a prototypical passive clause is also characterized both morphosyntactically and in term of its discourse function. The discourse function is

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frequently needed in case that morpho-syntactic markers are not clearly identified the passive construction.

Payne (2002) also mentions that, in general, there are two types of passive construction based on agent and semantic properties, namely personal and impersonal passives. Impersonal passives are those for which some specific agent is implied, but either is not expressed or is expressed in an oblique role. Related to grammatical features, personal passives can be lexical, morphological, or periphrastic (analytic). A lexical passive is any clause headed by a verb that is inherently passive in character. To be inherently passive, the verb must express a scene that includes the presence of causing AGENT, but the PATIENT must be the grammatical subject. The verb baaryi in Yagua, for instance, indicates the lexical passive (Payne, 2002).

(1) *Sa-   baaryi   -maa*
   3SG- be:killed : in battle-PERF
   'He was killed in battle'

Morphological passives are very common. They often employ the same or similar morphology as does perfect aspect. Passive morphemes are also sometimes derived from copulas or affixes/particles that form nominalizations on the PATIENT of a verb. The following example is the morphological passive in Kera (an Afroasiatic language) (see Payne, 2002):

(2) *Harga-ng de- ga- ge   gide hiuw-a   (kashulum-sa)*
   goat- DEF PASS put-REDUP womb pen- LOC hand ma- LOC
   'The goat was put in the pen (by the man)'

Meanwhile, periphrastic/analytic passives are indicated by morphosyntactic markers by means of copular verb plus the "past participle" (a PATIENT nominalization) of the active verb. The following is an example of English passive, the example of analytic passive.

(3) *The city was destroy-ed (by the enemy).*
       COP   PP

The second general type of passive is the impersonal one. The function of impersonal passives is essentially the same as that of a basic passive; they downplay the centrality of an AGENT. The only difference between personal and impersonal passives is that impersonal passives can be derived from intransitive as well as transitive verb.

German and Spanish have clear impersonal passives. In addition, there is other type of passives in English which is practically called *get passive*:

(4) *John got hit by a car*.

3. Volitionality in Passive Constructions

Linguists usually discuss the volitonality in relation with the verbal transitivity. Quoted Hopper and Thompson, Baker (in Fox and Hopper (eds.), 1994:25) explains that event-types may differ in transitivity. Transitivity is a composite notion, consisting of a number of interacting but basically separate parameters. Some of these refer to morphosyntactic coding (e.g. "modality"); others refer to semantic entities, inherent properties of the event denoted. Of these, some refer to the agent in the event (subject-related transitivity features that have to serve as parameters of a typology of event-types that may serve as the framework for the analysis of the Greek middle. Hopper and Thompson distinguish volitionality and agency; Baker (1994) adds one more parameter, that is causation.

Baker (1994) furthermore states that volitonality applies to the "free will" of the participant coded as the subject; a volitional event (e.g. *He jumped*) is higher in transitivity than any event in which volitonality is lacking (*He fell*). The second parameter, agency, applies when volitional action is directed toward some goal. This goal may be the subject/agent him/herself or a genuinely second participant in the event. Finally, agency turns into external causation which produces an effect (typically physical) on a patient (most by human). The three parameters together form a scale:

| **Volitionality** | > | **Agently** > | **Causation** |
| Low | | Transitivity | High |

In the scale, each item implies the presence of the item to the left. Thus, for example, any event that is agentive is volitional as well, by definition. Events may be located on this scale, by degree of increasing transitivity, on the basis of the role of their subject/agent.

Passive constructions, as a matter of fact, are the derived forms. Consequently, volitionality does not directly relate to them in the sense of transitivity because the passives themselves are the intransitive constructions. But the volitionality may have significant relationship with passives since the agent is still inside the constructions semantically. In accordance with this, the traditional understanding of voice should be

referred to. There are three accounts that should be considered then, namely: (i) voice represents a meaning relationship between the grammatical subject and the action denoted by the verb; (ii) voice refers to the category of grammatical subject; and (iii) voice refers to action (Shibatani in Kulikov and Vater (eds.), 1998:120 – 121). Related to these accounts, the volitionality mayhave something to do with passives; volitionality is the case included in passive constructions. In this case, the agent which initiates the action or event is not the grammatical subject. The sense of a volitional event and a meaning relationship between the grammatical subject and the action denoted by the verb are those that are relevant with the case of volitionality in passives (see Baker in Fox and Hopper (eds.), 1994; and Shibatani in Kulikov and Vater (eds.), 1998).

C. Volitionality in English Passives

As mentioned above, English passives are the type of periphrastic/analytic ones. Passives in English are indicated by morphosyntactic markers. English, in particular, generates passive constructions through a well known grammatical passivization "(COPULAR) BE + PAST PARTICIPLE". The formula becomes the icon of passivization in English with other common grammatical markers. Morphosyntactic markers work grammatically in order to derive active clause into passive one. It has been known also that English clearly differentiates the dichotomy of active and passive voice. The followings are the English passives (b) which are derived from the underlying forms (a).

(5) a. *They stole two Ming vases at that time.*
b. *Two Ming vases were stolen (by them) at that time.*
             COP   PP

(6) a. *Kim had guided the old man to the shops.*
b. *The old man had been guided (by Kim) to the shop.*
             COP   PP

(7) a. *Three cups of tea have revived the nurse.*
b. *The nurse has been revived (by three cups of tea).*
             COP   PP

(8) a. *A big stone hit his car.*
b. *His car was   hit (by a big stone).*
             COP   PP

Grammatically, all active-transitive clauses are possibly derived into passives in English. In relationship with volitionality, however, English passives may not clearly define the semantic features on volitional and non-volitonal events/actions initiated by the agent. Therefore, it is not easy to know and to interpret whether the following passives (b) are volitional or non-volitional ones.

(9) a. *His baby swallowed a small toothpick.*
    b. *A small toothpick was swallowed (by his baby).*
           COP   PP

(10) a. *The hot water poured her hands.*
    b. *Her hands were poured (by the hot water).*
          COP   PP

It is quite hard to determine whether the actions/events initiated by the agents his baby and the hot water in the passives are volitional or non-volitional based on the grammatical markers only. In order to have right interpretation on volitionality in English passives, involving the discourse and/or pragmatic functions is highly necessary. Volitional and non-volitional properties of the passives should be interpreted by involving extra-linguistic functions of the clauses. Normally, volitionalitiy in English passives cannot be traced and guessed based on the grammatical markers. Thus, the volitional properties of (above) English passives need to include the discourse and pragmatic functions, then.

Different case on volitionality of passive constructions occurs in *bahasa Indonesia* and in Minangkabaunese. Although these two languages belong to the accusative languages like English does, but they have different types of passivization. Paasives in bahasa Indonesia and in Minangkabaunese are the morphological type; marked by passive prefixes as the head-markers. Basically, passives in bahasa Indonesia are marked by prefix *di-* and *ter-*. Passivizatioan with *di-* generates volitional passives while passivization by using *ter-* may creates non-volitional ones. So that, the volitionality in bahasa Indonesia passives is clearly defined by different morphological markers. Therefore, the followings are assigned as volitional (11b) and non-volitional (11c) passives.

(11) a. *Orang itu   men- jual cincin warisan.*
    man   ART ACT-sell ring legacy
    'The man sold the legacy ring'

    b. *Cincin warisan di-   jual oleh orang itu.*
      ring   legacy PAS-VOL sell by   man ART
      'The legacy ring was (volitionally) sold by the man'

    c. *Cincin warisan ter-   jual   oleh orang itu.*
      ring   legacy PAS-NVOL sell   by   man ART
      'The legacy ring was (non-volitionally) sold by the man'

Volitionality in passive constructions also determined clearly by morphological markers in Minangkabaunese. There are three passive prefixes is Minangkabaunese, namely *di-, ta-,* and *ba-* as the head-markers (placed on VPs). Passivization by using *di-* generates volitional passives; *ta-* is the marker for non-volitional passives; and *ba-* is used to indicate volitional-agentless passives in Minangkabaunese. The following are the examples of passives in Minangkabaunese with different volitionality; (12b) is volitional passive; (12c) is non-volitional one; and (12d) is volitional-agentless passive construction.

    (12) a. *Saman mam-bali buku talarang.*
      Saman ACT-buy book illegal
      'Saman bought the illegal book'

    b. *Buku talarang di-   bali dek Saman.*
      book illegal   PAS-VOL buy by Saman
      'The illegal book was (volitionally) bought by Saman'

    c. *Buku talarang ta-   bali dek Saman.*
      book illegal   PAS-NVOL buy by Saman
      'The illegal book was (non-volitionally) bought by Saman'

    d. *Buku talarang ba-   bali dek Saman*
      book illegal   PAS-VOL-Agentless buy by Saman
      'The illegal book (volitionally) bought (dek Saman)'

Although English, bahasa Indonesia, and Minangkabaunese are typologically classified into accusative languages, but they have different strategies of passivization. Cross-lingusitically studies on passivization have proved that passivization among languages is various. It is finely believed that grammatical strategies and semantic

phenomena on voice (=diathesis) system should be in serious concern in the study of linguistic typology. Partial analysis of passivization in English, especially on volitionality, presented in this paper may be accounted as the proofs that language universal can certainly contain the language specific.

D. Concluding Remarks

Languages in the same grammatical typology do not always have the same phenomena on passivization. It is believed also that each language has its own special characteristics, event though all human languages have universal features, as well. The phenomena of volitonality in passive voice need further studies. The facts that volitionality in English passives can not easily defined based on grammatical features discussed in this paper may be one of grammatical discussion which could be questioned. Therefore, further studies and discussions are highly recommended to do.

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