

Diatheses in Germanic

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Summary

A definition of “diathesis” on both formal and semantic grounds is proposed that encompasses the relevant synthetic and analytic structures in the Germanic languages. An alternation between clauses is treated as a diathetical alternation (i) if one or more semantic roles associated with the main verb exhibit differential grammatical (i.e., morphological or syntactic) encoding, (ii) if the overt lexical expressions have same lexical roots, and (iii) if the clauses approximately share at least the meaning and truth conditions of the semantically less specific clause alternant.

This qualifies as diathesis what has become to be known as the canonical passive, impersonal passive, non-canonical passive, pseudo-passive, anticausatives, the dative alternation, the locative alternation, among others. The focus of this article is on the semantic restrictions governing a clause's participation in various diathetical alternations across the modern Germanic (standard languages). Semantic differences between alternating clauses are captured using a sophisticated semantic role account. At the same time, it is demonstrated that a multi-faceted event structure representation would be necessary for an adequate treatment of diatheses in Germanic that does not yet exist. Grammatical encoding of diathesis is described in a theory-neutral manner using the four-case system of the old Germanic languages as a *tertium comparationis* and syntactic function notions from descriptive typology. Diatheses are differentiated by the semantic roles that are fore- and backgrounded by means of the syntactic functions they bear. The role(s) that alternate in grammatical coding are foregrounded in the clause in which they have the higher syntactic function on a syntactic function hierarchy, and they are backgrounded in the clause in which they have the lower syntactic function. In a first set of diatheses alternations are described in which the proto-agent role is backgrounded and a proto-patient is foregrounded. This set includes an “eventive patient passive” and the “anticausative domain”. In a second set of diatheses the proto-agent is again backgrounded, but now the proto-recipient is foregrounded. This is illustrated using the “eventive recipient passive”. Completing this pattern, the “locational passive” represents a diathetical pattern in which the proto-agent role is backgrounded once more and the proto-locational role is foregrounded. Other types of diatheses in which the proto-locational is foregrounded and the proto-patient is backgrounded are exemplified by means of the location/possession alternation (dative alternation) and the location/affection alternation (e.g., locative and applicative alternations). Finally, further major diatheses that cannot be considered in detail are mentioned and classified according to the foregrounding/backgrounding classification.

Keywords

semantic roles, remapping, grammatical function, case, passive, dative alternation, anticausative, locative alternation, restrictions on alternations

1 Introduction: diathesis, genus verbi, voice

In its general usage, the term “diathesis” (Ancient Greek *διά* ‘through’, *θέσις* ‘arrangement, setting, position, disposition’) refers to a verb’s potential “states” or “conditions” by which it determines the grammatical shape of its semantic participants in a clause. In a more particular usage, each “state” type of a verb (or clause, for that matter) is itself called a diathesis. A verb

(or clause) token is said to “be in” a particular diathesis. Due to the close connection between a verb’s diathesis and the structure of the clause, the term is today sometimes used for the particular state of a verb and sometimes for the state of the clause in which it occurs. The states acknowledged in the grammatical tradition of Ancient Greece and Rome were the active, the passive and the middle. The Roman Latin equivalent to “diathesis” is “genus verbi” (Latin *genus* ‘sort, kind’, *verbum* ‘word, verb’). It is one of the feature classes in verbal inflection alongside person, number, tense, etc. Although Latin already had what is a periphrastic passive (in the *perfectum*) from a modern perspective, the nomenclature bespeaks the morphological character of diathesis in Ancient Greek and Latin grammar writing. Unlike in modern Germanic languages this made it relatively easy to determine the number of diatheses in those languages: diatheses manifest themselves in the definite and manageable inflectional paradigms of a verb, and what does not manifest itself in the verb morphologically, is not a diathesis. The modern equivalent of “diathesis” and “genus verbi” in the English-speaking modern literature is “voice” (from Latin *vox*). It covers the general (“voice in Germanic languages”) and particular (“the passive voice”, “This clause is in passive voice”) meanings of “diathesis” and includes both the morphological (synthetic) and syntactic (analytic, periphrastic) expression of diatheses, depending on the linguistic framework.

2 Identifying diatheses in Germanic

2.1 Criteria for identification

The classical grammatical tradition has long exerted and still continues to exert influence on Western grammaticography. As a consequence, diatheses in Germanic languages have long been described in terms of the categories of that tradition. Accordingly, diatheses in Germanic languages have been identified as the cognate constructions of the diatheses found in Greek and Latin, notwithstanding the fact that the meaning relations involved in them have gradually come to be expressed mainly by analytic structures during the development of the modern Germanic languages and dialects. However, if a theory of grammar is taken as a principled account of what makes expressions conventional/possible or impossible, this treatment of diathesis lacks principle: When being a feature class in verbal inflection ceases to be a defining property of diathesis, then the range of diatheses in a language (or languages) must be determined anew, or else the list of active, passive, and middle becomes arbitrary. At the same time, the inclusion of synthetic *and* analytic structures in diathesis makes the identification of diatheses on strictly formal grounds difficult or particularly abstract or both. A delineation of diathesis that is at the same time principled and close to observable phenomena must be based on both formal and

semantic criteria (cf. Levin, 1993; Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 2005). In fact, this comes close to how modern linguistic typology treats diathesis (cf. Shibatani, 2006; Kulikov, 2011; Malchukov, 2015; Zuñiga & Kittilä, 2019, and the Russian-Soviet precursors referenced therein). However, the classical tradition remains strong: The passive (i.e., the analytic analogue of the old synthetic passive) still counts as the prototypical non-active diathesis in accusative languages. Therefore, what happens semantically in the alternation between an “active” and a “passive” clause may serve as a starting point for inductive generalizations on diathetical form-meaning relationships. The following generalizations are employed to determine an alternation between two clauses as a diathetical alternation.¹

- i) Remapping condition: The clauses exhibit differential grammatical (i.e., morphological or syntactic) encoding of one or more semantic roles associated with the main verb. The simple omission/introduction of a role is excluded from diathesis, unless at least one additional role gets remapped or the verbal complex gets modified. This relationship is often described as alternation in valency patterns (cf. Haspelmath & Hartmann, 2015).
- ii) Lexical condition: The overt lexical expressions in the clauses have the same lexical roots. The diathetical alternation may, however, omit/introduce grammatical or semi-grammatical elements, such as affixes, auxiliaries, light verbs and reflexive elements out of/into one clause alternant.
- iii) Semantic condition: With respect to reference, the clauses approximately share their truth conditions, or at least share the truth conditions of the semantically less specific clause alternant. Regarding sense, the clauses approximately express the same conceptual content, or at least that of the less contentful clause alternant.²

All diathetical alternations are conceived as relations between two clauses. Notwithstanding, a clause may stand in diathetical relations with multiple other clauses, each constituting a separate diathetical alternation then.

Often, and mostly due to their historical relationship, one of the clause types is restricted vis-à-vis the other one in terms of frequency of use, conditions of use, and productivity (cf.

¹ For a more detailed and even broader definition cf. Cysouw (2021), applying it to German. A more comprehensive treatment would also have to include additional definitions like that of clause, light verb etc. (cf. Cysouw, 2021).

² With respect to aspectual approaches to diathesis, this condition does not require that the clause alternants have the same event structure but that the event structure of one alternant clause must be part of the event structure of the other. For instance, the event designated by one clause may be the final (resultant) sub-event in the other clause, as in *x kills y*, *y dies*.

Haspelmath, 1990). While Haspelmath claims this for “passives”, it may be extended to other diatheses as well (cf. Cysouw, 2021).

The conditions in (i) to (iii) cover most diatheses that are usually dealt with in the literature, among them what has come to be known as the “active”, the “canonical passive”, the “non-canonical passive”, the “impersonal passive”, the “pseudo-passive”, “anticausatives”, “causatives”, the “dative alternation”, the “locative alternation”, and “applicatives”. It is not possible to justice to them in a short article. Apart from the aforementioned diatheses, the conditions allow identifying additional diathetical alternations that are rarely attended to, either because of selective theoretical or historical foci, or because they are themselves only rarely attested. The identification of usually neglected diatheses requires an exhaustive, targeted survey of the constructions of a particular language without theoretical preconceptions. The results of such a survey can be found in Cysouw (2021) for German. The application of Cysouw’s procedure to other languages is highly desirable. Its results demonstrate that at present any survey of diatheses even in a single language is incomplete and only provisional, let alone surveys of diatheses across languages. Therefore, an encyclopedia article can only highlight some of the diatheses and their surrounding discussions. Nevertheless, there are some principal theoretical issues that concern not just a selection but all diathetical alternations. They concern the attempt at meaning-based explanations.

2.2 Semantic roles (SR)

There is no need of an elaborate semantic roles treatment for the mere identification and description of diathetical alternations. Following condition (i) it suffices to evaluate whether the same verbal participants in both clauses bear approximately the same or different meaning relations vis-à-vis the verb (or VP). However, semantic roles are highly relevant in another respect. It has long been noted that the question of whether a clause participates in a particular alternation or not depends on the quality of the relationships the verbal participants bear vis-à-vis the verb and vis-à-vis each other (e.g., Van Valin, 2005; Rappaport-Hovav, 2005). The various qualities of these meaning relations are traditionally captured in event structure representations and by semantic roles. As is well-known today, the specific roles associated with verbs in a language or even across languages are notoriously difficult to determine adequately on empirical grounds. Theories of linking are still grappling with positing a definite semantic role list at the right level of abstraction and the right level of generalization to explain the mapping relations between meanings and forms. Proposals range from verb-specific roles over construction specific roles to two universal proto-roles independent of any verb-type,

clause type or language (cf. Dowty, 1992; see also Van Valin; 1999; Levin & Rappaport-Hovav, 2005; Primus 1999, 2011a; Croft 2012; Kasper 2008, 2015; Cysouw, 2021). Conceived as a working hypothesis, the semantic roles employed in this article are given in Table 1. It is based the approach in Kasper (2015). The level of abstraction reflects a mid-level between a radically token-driven bottom-up approach *à la* Cysouw (2021) and a very general, universalist top-down approach of the Minimalist type (e.g., Harley, 2011).

Roles are characterized along two dimensions: firstly, a dimension based on event perception and conception encompassing causers, themes (moving or located entities) and locationals (sources, locations, goals); and, secondly, a dimension consisting of socio-cultural attributions to the spatio-temporal objects of the first dimension. It consists of responsibility/intention/control, co-responsibility/-intention/-control, sentience and interest attributions as well as of the attribution of neither of these in the case of inanimate entities.

socio-cultural attributions ↓	perceptual objects →	causer >	theme >	locational (source, loc., goal)
responsibility / intention / control >		causer-agent (<i>x murders y</i>)	self-propelling agent (<i>x runs</i>)	stationary agent (<i>x sings</i>)
co-responsibility / -intention / -control > (& ⊃)		recipient (<i>x congratulates y</i>)	co-self-propelling agent (<i>x follows y</i>)	co-stationary-agent (<i>x listens to y</i>)
sentience, interest >		accidental causer (<i>x frightens y accidentally</i>)	sentient patient (<i>x beats y</i>)	experiencer, benefactive (<i>x threatens y</i>)
neither (inanimate)		cause (<i>x frightens y</i>)	theme, patient (<i>x hits y</i>)	source/loc./goal (<i>x gets y from/at/to z</i>)

Table 1: Semantic roles

Traditional semantic roles can be reconstructed in those cells of Table 1 where the values from both dimensions intersect. For instance, a “causer-agent” would be a (prototypical transitive) causer that is also held responsible for what it causes, an inanimate “theme, patient” attributed

sentience would be(come) a (causally affected) “sentient patient”, and an inanimate locational would remain a bare source, location or goal. The cell-shadings exemplify a tentative role hierarchy that is subject to cross-linguistic variation regarding grammatical coding at the intersections between neighboring roles. Brighter cells reflect higher roles and darker cells reflect lower roles. Even a proto-role or macro-role hierarchy may be derived, if the cells with the same or similar shadings are subsumed under the respective labels, as exemplified in Table 2.

proto-agent (PA)	>	proto-recipient (PR)	>	proto-patient (PP)	>	proto-locational (PL)
causer-agent		recipient		sentient patient		source/loc./goal
self-prop. agent		co-self-prop.- agent		theme/patient		
stationary agent		agent				
accid. causer cause		co-stationary agent experiencer, benefactive				

Table 2: Exemplary assignment of roles to proto-roles

Restrictions on a clause’s participating in a diathetical alternation cannot fully be captured by the semantic distinctions laid down in semantic roles. Other factors which are either only partially included in semantic role notions or not at all also play important roles, among them the following, with reference to diathetical alternations:

- I. effects on the interpretation of verbal complements caused by differences in definiteness, individuation, aspect and the incorporation of path meaning components in verb meanings (e.g., Gruber, 1970; Krifka, 1989; Leiss, 1992; Tenny, 1992; Primus, 2011b).
 - (1) a. Mir fannen all Dag där Beispiller.
1PL find.3PL.PRS every day PART.PL example.PL
‘We have some of these examples every day.’
 - b. Mir find all Dag déi Beispiller.
1PL find.3PL.PRS every day DET.PLF example.PL

‘We have these examples every day.’

(partitive alternation, Luxemburgish, cf. Döhmer [2020])

Arguably, the objects differ in their degree of affectedness due to the partitive coding. Similar effects can be produced by other grammatical means. The meaning difference is hardly ever captured in semantic role distinctions.

- II. the conceptual type of eventuality expressed by the verb. A case in point is Tsunoda’s (1985, 2015) hierarchy of two-place predicates (physical affection > perception > pursuit > knowledge > feeling > relationship > ability) that allows strong typological generalizations about which verbal predicates participate in which diathetical alternations.
- III. event structure, i.e., the full set of aspects of the spatio-temporal layout of the circumstance designated by the verb and its complements, from sub-events over force dynamics to an entity’s conceptual boundedness (cf. Talmy’s [2000] “schematic systems”, Langacker’s [2008] “construal). In (3) but not in (2) the proto-patient/proto-locational has object features in perception/conception, restricting its participation in the locative alternation (Kasper, 2015).

(2) a. Er malt Zeichen in die Luft.³

3SGM draw.3SG.PRS sign.NOM/GEN/DAT/AKK.PL in DET air

‘He draws signs in the air.’

b. *Er bemalt die Luft mit Figuren.

3SGM APPL-draw.3SG.PRS sign.NOM/GEN/DAT/AKK.PL in DET air

‘He drew signs in the air.’

(3) a. Er malt Zeichen auf die Wand.

3SGM draw.3SG.PRS sign.NOM/GEN/DAT/AKK.PL on DET wall

‘He paints signs onto the wall.’

b. Er bemalt die Wand mit Zeichen.

3SGM APPL-draw.3SG.PRS sign.NOM/GEN/DAT/AKK.PL on DET wall

‘He paints the wall with signs.’

(locative alternation, German, cf. Kasper [2015: 432])

³ See URL: <<https://www.faz.net/aktuell/sport/fussball/kreisligaspiel-muss-nach-videobeweis-wiederholt-werden-15807660.html>> [Nov. 8, 2021]

IV. the entirety of pragmatic inferencing based on participant's lexical features (e.g., animacy) in particular syntactic constructions. For instance, we may infer a recipient out of a goal, or a causer-agent out of a cause based on animacy (Holisky, 1987; Van Valin & Wilkins, 1996; Kasper 2015). Whether or not a clause participates in an alternation is often based on inferential meaning, not on lexical and grammatical meaning alone.

- (4) a. Faule Zwiebeln / Knoblauchesser stinken. (German)
rotten onions.NOM.PL garlic-eater.PL stink.3PL.PRS
- b. Es darf (von Knoblauchessern / *von faulen Zwiebeln) gestunken werden.⁴
it may.3SG.PRS by garlic-eaters / by rotten onions stink.PTCP become.INF
(impersonal passive, German)

V. the conceptual perspective on an eventuality, evidenced by figure-ground asymmetries in syntax in the form of grammatical function asymmetries (Langacker, 2008). Perspective dependence motivates diatheses but is not captured in semantic roles.

- (5) a. Hij lijkt op de paus.
3SGM.NOM resemble.3SG.PRS on DET.NOM/AKK.SG pope
'He resembles the pope.'
- b. De paus lijkt op hem.
DET.NOM/AKK.SG pope resemble.3SG.PRS on 3SGM.DAT/ACC
'The pope resembles him.'
- c. Zij lijken op elkaar.
3PL resemble.3PL.PRS on each.other
'They resemble each other.'
- (symmetric verb alternation, Dutch)

- (6) a. Ich erwarte eine schlimme Operation. (German, Cysouw, p.c.)
1SG.NOM expect.3SG.PRS DET.NOM/AKK.SG bad operation
'I expect a bad operation.'
- b. Mich erwartet eine schlimme Operation.

⁴ See URL: <<https://www.ka-news.de/region/karlsruhe/Es-darf-gestunken-werden;art6066,41325>> [Nov. 8, 2021].

1SG.AKK expect.3SG.PRS DET.NOM/AKK.SG bad operation.

lit. 'A bad operation expects me.'

(dual metaphor alternation, German)

The alternant clauses in (6) represent alternative ways of construing the same temporal relations. The progression of time is conceptualized as spatial movement. In one reference frame (6a) Ego is stationary, and as time progresses the future event approaches ("comes to") Ego. In the other reference frame (6b) the future event is stationary, and as time progresses Ego approaches ("comes to") the future OP (cf. Lakoff, 1993).

- VI. the degree of experiential grounding of the expressed eventuality. The less grounded an eventuality is in embodied experience, the more restricted the syntactic pattern is with respect to alternations in comparison to a more grounded eventuality expressed by the same syntactic pattern (Kasper 2015). This includes abstract and metaphorical language.

(7) a. They broke the vase / the contract.

b. The vase / *The contract broke.

(anticausative, English, cf. Schäfer [2009: 654])

In the light of these caveats, semantic roles must certainly be considered semantic notions that are not primitives but derived from a coherent meaning representation that takes all these factors into account but does not yet exist. Against the background of prevalent theoretical explanations for diathetical alternations it cannot be emphasized enough that one or more of these factors play a role in the restrictions on each of the diatheses discussed in the remainder of this article.

2.3 Verbally governed case (CASE) and licensing of grammatical functions (GF)

No less difficult than an exhaustive explanation of the semantic restrictions on diathetical alternations across Germanic languages is their coherent formal description, not to mention the explanation of their formal restrictions. The remapping condition in (i) mentions the grammatical, i.e., morphological or syntactic, encoding of semantic roles. Most of the time, a descriptive level of grammatical functions is employed to mediate between semantic roles and grammatical coding. In Germanic languages the grammatical functions of a verb's participants can on the one hand be indicated by means of morphological case categories and prepositions (i.e., "flagging"), and on the other hand by their structural position in the clause. As a tendency

(though not a rule), the less case (and agreement) categories a language distinguishes in its inflectional paradigms, the more it employs structural configurations to indicate the functions of constituents in the clause (but not the other way around). However, since functions like subject, indirect object, direct object and prepositional object are more morphologically expressed in some languages and must be diagnosed on more syntactic grounds in others, grammatical functions cannot be taken to exhibit the same properties across all languages. Oftentimes diagnostics are not applicable in all languages (for instance, the catalogue for subjecthood in Thráinsson, 2007).

verbally governed cases ⁵	Nom.	Acc.	Dat.	Gen.	Instr.
*Germanic	*✓	*✓	*✓	*✓	*✓
Old Norse	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Old English	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)
Old High German	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)
Old Saxon (Old Low German)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Old Frisian	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Old Dutch	✓	✓	✓	✓	
New High German	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	
Modern Icelandic	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Modern Faroese	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	
Modern Yiddish	✓	✓	✓		
New Low German	✓	✓			
Pennsylvania German	✓	✓			
Modern Luxembourgish	✓	✓		(✓) ⁶	
Modern Dutch	✓	✓	(✓)		
Modern Afrikaans	✓	✓			
Modern Frisian	✓	✓			
Modern English	✓	✓			

⁵ Case categories have a checkmark if they are productive somewhere in the grammar of a language. The checkmarks are in parentheses if cases still have exponents in a language but are not productive any more.

⁶ Cf. Döhmer (2020).

Modern Danish	✓	✓			
Modern Swedish	✓	✓			
Modern Norwegian	✓	✓			

Table 3: Verbally governed case categories in Germanic (sample)

Regarding the morphological “flagging” of grammatical functions, the case system of the old Germanic languages (like *Gm, ON, OE, OHG, OS, OF, OD, and Go) will serve as a *tertium comparationis* for the coding patterns of the younger ones (Table 3). The following grammatical functions are employed (Table 4).

abbrev.	name	property (language-specific)
SUB	subject	morphological and/or structural
OBJ1	primary object	struct.: leftmost verbally governed OBJ in the VP
OBJ2	secondary object	struct.: non-leftmost verbally governed OBJ in the VP
IOBJ	indirect object	morph.: object with a semantically more restricted case
DOBJ	direct object	morph.: object with the semantically less restricted case
POBJ	prep. object	morph.: object governed by a preposition

Table 4: grammatical functions

3 Some spotlights on Germanic diatheses

Diatheses are systematized according to the semantic roles that are fore- and backgrounded in diathetical clause pairs by way of differential grammatical coding. A semantic role’s being foregrounded or backgrounded in relation to its equivalent in the alternant clause depends on its grammatical coding according to the hierarchy in (8):

$$(8) \text{ SUB } > \text{ OBJ1 / IOBJ } \geq \text{ OBJ2 / DOBJ } > \text{ POBJ } > \text{ zero expression}$$

foregrounding \longleftarrow \longrightarrow backgrounding

The rationale behind this hierarchy is that in active declarative clauses with wide focus subjects in intransitive clauses, and subjects and objects in transitive clauses are core participants of the verb. They are most often obligatory constituents of (finite) clauses usually closer attached to the verb than non-core, prepositionally marked participants. In addition, the subject, if present, has privileged status vis-à-vis the core objects (cf. Van Valin & LaPolla, 1997).

Corpus studies (where available) and even *ad hoc* search engine queries demonstrate that many judgments of ungrammaticality in the theoretical literature are not as reliable as they ought to be. (Contrariwise, judgments of grammaticality cannot be falsified using corpus data). This is one reason why this article focuses more on meaning-based restrictions on diathetical alternations and not so much on purely syntactic explanations, since their data basis is neither very reliable nor representative.

3.1 The unmarked active as a reference for fore-and backgrounding relations

The active serves as a reference clause in most diatheses in two respects. Firstly, fore- and backgrounding is relative. The fore- and backgrounding pattern of a diathetical alternation is usually determined with reference to the active. Secondly, although it is in principle possible that a diathesis is identified based on two non-active clauses, most diatheses can be constructed out of an active clause and a non-active clause, or out of two active clauses. In either case one, or the, active clause will be less marked, less restricted in its use, and more productive, like (9a) is vis-à-vis (9b).

(9)a. Ich friere.

1SG.NOM am.cold.3SG.PRS

b. Mich friert.

1SG.AKK am.cold.3SG.PRS

‘I am cold.’

(German)

The following diatheses are systematized according to the fore- and backgrounded semantic roles. The roles are referred to as proto-roles and by their abbreviations according to Table 2. Upward and downward arrows stand for fore- and backgrounding, respectively.

3.2 Backgrounding of proto-agents (foregrounding of proto-patients): ↓PA(/↑PP)

The common denominator of a first set of diatheses is the grammatical backgrounding of the proto-agent. In some diatheses of this kind the backgrounding of the proto-agent is accompanied by the foregrounding of the proto-patient. In others, no foregrounding takes place. Diatheses of this type can further be differentiated by certain changes in the verbal complex and the introduction of (semi-)grammatical elements into the clause that show agent backgrounding.

3.2.1 ↓PA(/↑PP): *eventive patient passive*

There is a prominent group of diatheses in which the proto-agent is backgrounded and the verbal complex is modified. Subtypes differ as to whether or not the proto-patient gets foregrounded.

3.2.1.1 ↓PA/↑PP: *eventive patient passive*

The first passive subtype considered is the eventive patient passive (also called “canonical passive”). The proto-patient is foregrounded and the proto-agent is backgrounded either by means of a prepositional object headed by ‘by’ or by non-expression, which is the more common strategy in everyday use (Table 5). If unexpressed, the proto-agent is still understood, as can be seen by adding an adverb like ‘deliberately’ to the passive clause; the deliberation is attributed to the proto-agent, not to the proto-patient. The realization of a ‘by’-phrase leads to a “long passive”, its non-realization to a “short passive”. (10b) is an example of a periphrastic eventive patient passive diathesis.

(10) a. *di froj kojft dem tiš.*

DET.NOM/ACC woman buy.3SG.PRS DET.DAT/ACC table

‘The woman is buying the table.’

b. *der tiš vert gəkojft (durx der froj).*

DET.NOM table become.3SG.PRS buy.PTCP by DET.DAT woman

‘The table is being bought (by the woman).’

(Yiddish, Jacobs [2005: 220])

The lexical verb of the active clause (*kojft* in (10a)) is unmarked vis-à-vis the verbal complex in the passive clause which is composed of a passive auxiliary (*vert*) and a past participle (*gəkojft*). The passive auxiliary agrees with the foregrounded subject in person and number. All Germanic languages have such a periphrastic passive with a passive auxiliary ‘be’ or ‘become’ which in combination with a past participle may give rise to an interpretation in which the subject of the auxiliary is the proto-patient undergoing the dynamic event described by the participle. In some Germanic languages (Icelandic, Faroese, Swedish) and varieties (Nynorsk, Highest Alemannic) which have preserved earlier language states the past participle agrees with the subject in number, gender (Swedish⁷, Nynorsk, Highest Alemannic), and case (Faroese, Icelandic); in the others it is uninflected or has a default form.

⁷ In Swedish, the agreement or non-agreement of the past participle with the subject depends on the object’s preceding or following the participle (cf. Holmberg 2001).

(11) Elgen vart skoten.

elk-DEF.NOM.SGM be.3SG.PST shoot.PTCP-SGM

‘The elk was shot.’

(Nynorsk, [Áfarli 2009: 168])

(12) wie chund daas gmachts?

how become.3SG.PRS that.NOM.SGN make.PTCP-NOM.SGN

‘How is that (being) done?’

(Highest Alemannic [Valais], cf. Wipf [1909: 145])

In Icelandic and Faroese, which supposedly have non-nominative subjects, past participles in passives agree with nominative-subjects only and bear a default N.SG marking with accusative, dative (both languages) and genitive subjects (only Icelandic) (cf. Thráinsson, 2007; Thráinsson et al. 2004).

By definition, the “canonical passive” has an eventive meaning. Some of the languages, like English, employ only a stative auxiliary ‘be’ which in the construction is ambiguous between a stative (see section 3.2.1.2) and an eventive reading (see the translation of (12)). The verbal complex with a historically stative ‘be’ must therefore have been grammaticalized to the extent that it at least allows for an eventive reading. This is relevant especially for the older and oldest Germanic languages. A proto-patient subject combined with of a form of ‘be’ and an (inflected) past participle of a telic transitive verb was originally a predicative construction with a stative resultative reading, ‘be’ being a copula and the participle an adjective. On the one hand, this sheds light on a stativization function of the construction out of which the canonical passive emerged, and on the other hand it makes the exact historical stages in which periphrastic passives arose a matter of dispute, since the expression pattern had already been in place before it took on a passive sense and eventually became a passive construction (cf. Mailhammer & Smirnova, 2013). For instance, eventive readings of ‘be’-passives seem to have been possible already in Old English, while the possibility of eventive passives with ‘be’ in the history of German is disputed (cf. Jones & Macleod, 2018; Jones 2009).

With forms of ‘become’ German like several other languages has an eventive passive auxiliary besides the stative *sein* ‘be’, while ‘become’ is only rarely used in Modern English as a passive auxiliary. However, English is special among Germanic languages in that it has developed a telic passive auxiliary from a lexical root: *get*. Although other languages in the family also have forms of ‘get’ as passive auxiliaries, their use is restricted to “eventive

recipient passives” (section 3.3.1), whereas English ‘get’-passives foreground patients, too. Like patient passives with telic auxiliaries in other languages, they trigger eventive readings, if combined with telic participles.

- (13) a. Someone was arrested (by the police).
‘Someone was (being) arrested (by the police).’
b. Someone got arrested (by the police).

(English)

Gothic is the only attested Germanic language that in addition to a periphrastic pattern with a passive meaning displays residues of the Indo-European synthetic middle with passive meaning (cf. Luraghi et al., 2021). And the Mainland Scandinavian languages have developed a younger synthetic passive in parts of their verbal paradigms (14b). The passive suffix is the result of the grammaticalization of a reflexive pronoun (cf. Laanemets, 2009; Lundquist, 2016). While the use of this so-called “s-passive” is largely unrestricted in Swedish where it is the most common form of passive, it is more restricted in Danish and highly restricted in Norwegian varieties where it is the preferred expression strategy for generic events (Engdahl, 1999, 2006). Similar verbal suffixes occur in Icelandic and Faroese but with a greater meaning range than just passive (cf. Thráinsson, 2007; Thráinsson et al., 2004).

- (14) a. Nogen udbringer posten hver dag.
someone.NOM/ACC deliver.3SG.PRS mail-DEF.NOM/ACC every day
‘Someone delivers the mail every day.’
b. Posten udbringes hver dag.
mail-DEF.NOM/ACC deliver.3SG.PRS.PASS every day
‘The mail is being delivered every day.’

(Danish, b. from Faarlund [2019: 173])

Germanic languages differ noticeably with respect to the restrictions on the canonical passive. There is a well-known relative criterion for a canonical passive: the active subject must be higher on the semantic role hierarchy than the object (cf. Jackendoff, 1972). This does not explain why two languages treat the “same” verb differently. For instance, transitive ‘knit’, ‘frighten’, and (non-agentive) ‘get’ with human subjects are all possible in English canonical passives, but only the first two are also possible in German canonical passives, and only the

first is possible in Icelandic. This points to the fact that there is an absolute criterion regarding semantic roles besides the relative one, such that the higher of two roles must not be positioned lower on the hierarchy than at a particular position. This position is subject to variation across languages. With reference to Table 1 English would require something between a proto-agent and a proto-recipient (recipient) as an active subject in order for it to be backgroundable in a canonical passive (as long as the object is still lower in the hierarchy). In German a proto-agent would be necessary and in Icelandic nearly only a causer-agent would license a canonical passive (including self-propelling causing machines).


eventive patient passive	“active”			“passive”		
SR 	PA	PP	(...)	PP	PA	(...)
GF	SUB	OBJ2 / DOBJ	(...)	SUB	(POBJ)	(...)
CASE	nom	acc ⁸	(...)	nom	(‘by’ NP)	(...)
verbal complex	unmarked			analytic: AUX _{‘be(come)’} + past participle AUX _{get} (English) AUX _{ginn} (Luxemburgish) AUX _{bli(ve)} (MSc) participle agreement (Modern Scandinavian minus Danish and Bokmål)		
				%synthetic (Gothic, MSc)		

Table 5: Eventive patient passive

3.2.1.2 Further passives

When it comes to further passive diatheses, the stative patient passive (as an “adjectival passive”), and the impersonal passive are usually mentioned. However, the “adjectival passive” has a stative auxiliary and may be argued to be a copula construction with a predicative adjective (cf. Alexiadou & Schäfer, 2020). As such, it would not satisfy the criteria for a diathesis which requires the remapping of “verbal” participants. If the respective constructions

⁸ Icelandic and Faroese have verbs with genitive and dative objects in the active that are remapped as passive subjects without changing their coding properties. They are presumably not instances of the patient passive, since the respective genitive and dative complements can be argued to be proto-recipients rather than proto-patients (Thráinsson, 2007; Thráinsson et al., 2004). Accordingly, they are discussed in section 3.3.1.

are really copula constructions, one could predict that the backgrounded role (if there is one) is semantically less restricted than in eventive patient passives. Using Icelandic as an example, where eventive patient passive subjects had to be real agents, this prediction seems to be borne out (15).

- (15) Fyrsta [...] hæðin var upplýst
 first floor.NOM.SGF be.3SG.PST illuminate.PTCP.NOM.SGF
 af fimm aðeins stærrri [gluggum] [...]9
 by five only bigger windows
 ‘The first floor was illuminated by five slightly larger windows.’

(Icelandic)

In the so-called “impersonal passive” diathesis the role with subject grammatical function in an active clause is backgrounded in the corresponding passive clause either by means of a prepositional object headed by ‘by’ or by non-expression. No role is foregrounded as subject in the passive clause (Table 6). In impersonal passives Germanic languages either require, disallow, or sometimes allow and sometimes disallow a non-role bearing expletive subject ‘it’ or quasi-subject ‘there’ to stand in syntactically for a role-bearing subject (16)–(19).

- (16) In park vert (*es) gəzungən.
 in park become.3SG.PRS EXPL sing.PTCP
 ‚Singing is happening in the park.’

(Yiddish, Jacobs [2005: 260])

- (17) I går ble *(det) danset hele natten.
 yesterday become.3SG.PST EXPL dance.PTCP whole night-DEF
 ‘Yesterday, there was dancing the whole night.’

(Bokmål, Faarlund [2019: 177])

- (18) a. Daar word in die boek na hulle verwys.
 EXPL become.3SG.PRS in DEF book to 3PL reference.PTCP
 b. In die boek word na hulle verwys.
 in DEF book become.3SG.PRS to 3PL reference.PTCP

⁹ URL: <[https://wikiscuba.com/wiki/Salzhaus_\(Frankfurt_am_Main\)](https://wikiscuba.com/wiki/Salzhaus_(Frankfurt_am_Main))> [Nov. 7, 2021].

‘There's a reference to them in this book.’

(Afrikaans, Donaldson [1993: 135])

(19) An do wurt 'ar a hiale naacht daanset.

and then become.3SG.PRS EXPL DEF whole night dance.PTCP

‘And then there is dancing the whole night.’

(Frisian, Arfsten et al. [2019: 53])

The MSc languages that have a synthetic patient passive also have a synthetic impersonal passive (20). In Swedish this passive is the only productive strategy of forming an impersonal passive (cf. Engdahl 2006).

(20) Der festedes til klokken 2.

EXPL party.3SG.PST.PASS to clock 2

‘There was partying until 2 a.m.’

(Danish, Faarlund [2019: 184])

Therefore, the criterion deciding over a verb's or clause's participating in an impersonal passive alternation cannot be a relative one as in the “canonical passive”, but it must be an absolute one. What makes the “impersonal passive” alternation possible is the sole participant's position on the semantic hierarchy. It seems that in most languages with an impersonal passive, the corresponding active subject is a real agent, i.e., an object attributed intention, responsibility, or control (cf. Bruikhuis et al., 2015; Kasper, 2015). Roles other than “real” (causer, self-propelling, stationary) agents are possible in some languages like German and Dutch (Primus, 2011b), if the participant entity is low in definiteness, individuation and referential identity, such that the impersonal passive construction becomes indefinite (cf. Leiss, 1992) and expresses a homogeneous (Primus, 2011b) event. It then takes on an iterative, generic, habitual or dispositional reading (21) (cf. Primus, 2011b).

(21) Gewachsen wird (??von unseren Kindern / ?von Kindern / Ø) nachts.

grow.PTCP become.3SG by our kids / by kids / Ø at.night

‘Things/people grow at night.’

(German, cit. in Primus [2011b: 83])


impersonal passive	“active”		“passive”	
SR 	PA	(...)	(PA) ¹⁰	(...)
GF	SUB	(...)	(POBJ)	(...)
CASE	nom	(...)	(‘by’ NP)	(...)
verbal complex	unmarked	analytic:		
		✓ AUX ^{‘be(come)’} + past participle participle agreement (Modern Scandinavian languages minus Danish & Bokmål) expletive required ¹¹ (e.g., English, MSc) expletive sometimes (e.g., Faroese, Dutch, Afrikaans) expletive disallowed (e.g., German, Yiddish ¹² , Icelandic)		
		synthetic (MSc)		
		expletive required (MSc)		

Table 6: Impersonal passive

3.2.2 ↓PA/↑PP: *the anticausative domain*

In so-called “anticausative” clauses the proto-patient object from an active clause is foregrounded as the subject. The proto-agent subject from the active clause is usually backgrounded by omission. Its involvement with the eventuality is part of our encyclopedic knowledge. Whether and when it may be expressed using a ‘by’-phrase depends on whether the anticausative is of the lexical (allegedly disallowed) or syntactic (allowed) kind. In both alternant clauses the proto-patient is physically or metaphorically affected by the proto-agent.

The verbal complex comes in a lexical variant with the sub-types in 1)–3) and a syntactic variant with a light-verb in 4) (Table 7):

1) lexical verbs are identical in the causative and the anticausative clauses (22), but in some languages a non-participant reflexive pronoun occurs in the latter (23b);

(22) The book sells well.

¹⁰ The proto-agent is argued to be conceptually, but not grammatically implied in the Scandinavian languages (cf. Alexiadou & Schäfer [2020: 472]).

¹¹ Cf. Alexiadou & Schäfer (2020: 471–472).

¹² Cf. Jacobs (2005: 225).

- (23) a. der soykher ferkoyft dos bukh.
 DET.NOM.SG vendor sell.3SG.PRS. DET.NOM/AKK book
 ‘The vendor sells the book.’
- b. dos bukh farkoyft zikh shlekht.
 DET.NOM/AKK.SG book. sell.3SG.PRS REFL bad
 ‘The book sells badly.’

(Yiddish, Birzer [2014: 276])

2) there is a strong/weak or ablaut/umlaut alternation in the otherwise identical lexical verbs (24)–(25);

- (24) a. True friends raise conflicts. / Companies fell trees and raise industrial plants.
 b. Conflicts raise easily.¹³
 c. Mossville, Louisiana: A Place Where Fruit Trees Fall & Industrial Plants Rise¹⁴
 (English)

- (25) a. Þeir veltu steininum niður brekkuna.
 they3PL.NOM roll.3PL.PST stone-DEF.DAT.SG down slope.DET
 ‘They rolled the stone down the slope.’
- b. Steinninn/*Steininum valt niður brekkuna.
 stone-DEF.NOM/*DAT roll.3PL.PST stone-DEF.DAT.SG down slope.DET
 ‘The stone rolled down the slope.’
 (Icelandic, Thráinsson [2007: 301])

3) the lexical verb is inflected “reflexively” in the anticausative clause (26).

- (26) Stóllinn eyðilagðist.
 chair-DEF.NOM.SG destroy-ST
 ‘The chair was destroyed.’
 (Icelandic, Thráinsson [2007: 284])

¹³ URL: <<https://catyhartung.com/blog/skillful-means-in-conversation>> [Nov. 8, 2021].

¹⁴ URL: <<https://www.ecomadic.com/online-green-travel-magazine-articles/mossville-louisiana>> [Nov. 8, 2021].

4) the lexical verb occurs in the infinitive and a light verb ‘let’ is introduced together with a non-participant reflexive. An agent ‘by’-phrase is possible (27).

(27) Het hout laat *(zich) (door iedereen) gemakkelijk bewerken.

DET.NOM/AKK wood let.3SG.PRS REFL by everyone easily carve.INF

‘The wood carves easily.’

(Dutch, cf. Bruikhuis et al. [2015: 504])

The anticausative diathesis as characterized in 1)–4) is a highly heterogeneous class that includes so-called “middles” taking agentive verb roots (‘sell’, ‘raise’, ‘destroy’), anticausatives taking patientive intransitive verb roots (intransitive ‘break’, ‘roll’, ‘tear’) and Insular Scandinavian verbs with *s(t)*-suffixes. They all have similar though not identical meaning ranges and slightly differ with respect to their grammatical properties. There is an ongoing debate which of these associations of forms and meanings constitute distinct constructions (e.g., Steinbach, 2002; Lekakou, 2005; Ackema and Schoorlemmer, 2005; Schäfer, 2008, 2009; Alexiadou & Doron, 2012; Fábregas & Putnam, 2014, 2020; Pitteroff 2014, 2015; Cysouw 2021). In comparison to other diathetical alternations, positing distinct construction classes in the anticausative domain based solely on individual grammaticality judgements is a particularly unreliable source of evidence.

In many examples given in 1) to 4) present tense, the presence of VP modification and the absence of a proto-agent promote a non-actual, dispositional reading in which a stable disposition is ascribed to the proto-patient subject. This is characteristic of “middles”: they are stative. These clause features are not obligatory, however. When they are altered, concrete, dynamic readings become acceptable which move them closer to patientive, intransitive anticausatives (26), (28c, 28d). In lexical anticausatives, altering the clause features also seems to alter the acceptability of a ‘by’-phrase expressing an instrument or (eventive) cause, though presumably not an agent (28b).

- (28) a. They broke it.
b. It broke (by magic¹⁵).
c. It breaks // broke // is / has broken easily.
d. It does (not) / did (not) break.

¹⁵ URL: https://soundforums.net/community/help/stuff_broke/ [Nov. 9, 2021].


anticausative	“causative”			“anticausative”		
SR 	PA	PP	(...)	PP	%(PA)	(...)
GF	SUB	OBJ2/DOBJ	(...)	SUB	%(POBJ)	(...)
CASE	nom	acc %dat (Icelandic)	(...)	nom	%(‘by’ NP)	(...)
verbal complex	%unmarked <i>%umlaut/ablaut</i>			lexical: %unmarked (e.g., English) <i>%umlaut/ablaut</i> %+reflexive (e.g., German, Dutch) %verbal <i>s(t)</i> -affix (modern North Germanic)		
	unmarked			syntactic: %‘let’ + REFL + INF %‘let’ + REFL + V-s (Swedish)		

Table 7: The anticausative domain

As with the other diathetical alternations, a matter of dispute is what governs a verb’s or clause’s participating in anticausatives. One idea with respect to the alternation between agentive transitive causatives and patientive intransitive anticausatives is the following: it seems that the intransitive clauses require that, conceptually, a particular eventuality can be cut “at its event-structural joints”, i.e., where the proto-agent first exerts physical or metaphorical force on the proto-patient and after that the latter undergoes the affection by that force (29) (Kasper, 2015).

(29) *kill*: CAUSE (x, GO-FROM alive’ TO dead’ (y))

sub-event 1: proto-agent (x) exerts force

sub-event 2: proto-patient (y) changes its state from alive to dead

This allows the prediction that only those lexical verbs can occur in an patientive intransitive anticausative, where the latter sub-event can in fact be conceptualized as being disjoint from the first sub-event. The intransitive variants should be especially acceptable with verbs designating events that are conceptualized to (also) occur spontaneously, i.e., without agentive initiation, as with tearing (30). They should decrease in acceptability with verbs designating events that by tendency do not take place (or are conceptualized to not take place) without being initiated by a responsible causer, as with cutting (cf. Croft 1991, Haspelmath 1993, Schäfer &

Vivanco 2016). In addition, the verbs in this alternation may be stative (activities) and dynamic (accomplishments, achievements).

- (30) a. Sie zerreißen / zerschneiden die Hose.
3PL tear.3PL.PRS / cut.3PL.PRS DET.NOM/AKK.SG pants.SG
'They are tearing / cutting the pants.'
- b. Die Hose zerreißt / *zerschneidet.
DET.NOM/AKK.SG tear.3SG.PRS / cut.3SG.PRS
'The pants are tearing / *cutting.'

(German, cf. Haspelmath [1993: 93])

Other restrictions seem to exist when the verb in the intransitive clause is unambiguously an inherently transitive agentive verb like 'sell' (22), (23). The verb's being agentive seems to effect that the clause does not only designate the latter, caused, sub-event but the whole event. This may be the reason why these anticausative clauses are less restrictive with respect to verb semantics: they do allow verbs that require responsible (i.e., non-eventive) causer-agents. The inherently transitive agentive verbs that figure in the anticausative clauses are predominantly activity and accomplishment verbs, if the anticausatives are of the lexical kind. The syntactic anticausative variant involving 'let' and a grammatical reflexive show even less restrictions. They seem to be licensed also by achievement verbs and verbs that need not involve the proto-patients actual affectedness by force (31).

- (31) a. *Diese Krankheit erkennt sich nicht leicht.
DEM disease.NOM/AKK.SG recognize.3SG.PRS REFL not easily
- b. Diese Krankheit lässt sich nicht leicht erkennen. (LM)
DEM disease.NOM/AKK.SG let.3SG.PRS REFL not easily recognize.INF
'This disease cannot be recognized easily.'

(German, Fagan, cit. in Pitteroff [2015: 11])

Turning to the Scandinavian anticausatives built with the verbal *s(t)*-suffix, they provide a heterogeneous picture regarding their meanings. While in Icelandic clauses with *st*-verbs seem to have a number of different meanings (cf. Thráinsson, 2007), the primary function of the cognate *s*-affix in Swedish is the passive (see section 3.2.1). In Norwegian it has a prototypical

medium meaning. (32) with its dispositional “middle-meaning” is therefore only acceptable in Norwegian (Fábregas & Putnam, 2020).

(32) Denne bandasjen fjernes lett fra huden.

DEM bandage-DEF remove-S easily from skin-DEF

‘This bandage is easy to remove from the skin.’

(Norwegian, Fábregas & Putnam [2020: 160])

Both Swedish and Norwegian have a further strategy of expressing middle-meanings (33), although it does not belong in the anticausative domain.

(33) a. Denne boken er lett-lest.

DEM book-DEF is easy-read.PTCP

‘This book is easy to read.’

(Norwegian, Fábregas & Putnam [2020: 159])

b. Den här boken är lätt-läst.

DEM here book-DEF is easy-read

‘This book reads easily.’

(Swedish, Fábregas & Putnam [2020: 159])

Only Swedish has a construction which combines light ‘let’ with a grammatical reflexive and an *s*-marked, i.e., passive, verb to yield middle-meaning (34).

(34) Boken låter sig läsas utan svårighet.

book-DEF let.3SG.PRS REFL read-S without difficulty

‘The book reads easily.’

(Swedish, Klingvall [2012: 395])

3.3 Backgrounding of proto-agents, foregrounding of proto-recipients: ↓PA/↑PR

3.3.1 ↓PA/↑PR: eventive recipient passive

A prominent example of a diathetical alternation in which the proto-agent from the active clause is backgrounded and the proto-recipient from the active clause is foregrounded as subject is the eventive recipient passive. Within the Germanic languages, this passive type is less common

than the eventive patient passive. Its “non-canonical” status is indicated (i) by the fact that the proto-recipient is usually encoded by a semantically more restricted case exponent in the active than the proto-patient, (ii) by the fact that unlike the common canonical auxiliaries ‘be’ and ‘become’ the recipient passive auxiliary has usually been recruited from semantically “heavier” lexical verbs of ‘getting’ that have grammaticalized and continue to grammaticalize, and (c) by the fact that fewer verbs are eligible for this type of passive: In the prototypical case these are ditransitive verbs with a transfer meaning (35)–(38). Like its canonical cousin, the eventive recipient passive exhibits a past participle (Table 8).

(35) De fik fortalt et eventyr.

3PL get.3PL tell.PTCP DET fairytale

‘They were told a fairytale.’

(Danish, Faarlund [2019: 186])

(36) De Jong kritt d’Buch (vun der Schwëster) geléint.

DEF boy.NOM/AKK.SG get.3SG DEF book.NOM/AKK by DEF sister lend.PTCP

‘The boy is borrowed the book by the sister.’

(Luxemburgish, Lenz [2017a: 197])

(37) Hi fing en bilj feriareet faan san reeder.

3SG.NOM get.3G DET.NOM/DAT/AKK.SG picture present.PTCP by his shipowner

‘He was given a picture by his shipowner (as a present).’

(Frisian, Hoekstra [2019: 165])

(38) Wi hebbt dat schenkt krēgen.

1PL.NOM have.1PL DEM present.PTCP get.INF

‘We were given it (as a present).’

(Low German, Hamburgisches Wörterbuch, cit. in Lenz [2017b: 65])

One important characteristic of lexical verbs of getting (Wgm *krīgan ‘strive, struggle’, PGm *fanhaną ‘take, seize, capture, catch’) is that in the history of their grammaticalization towards passive auxiliaries they have first (had) self-propelling agents and causer-agents, later recipients (‘obtain’, ‘receive’), and even later benefactives (‘passively get’) (in the sense of Table 1) as subjects (cf. Lenz, 2013, for German *kriegen* and *bekommen*, Askedal, 2012, for Norwegian *få*,

Old Icelandic *fá* in Zoëga, 1910). In other, active, constructions, verbs of getting may still exist as lexical verbs with the earlier meanings (39)–(40).

(39) Hi [...] füng Pregg an Pös tu Hunn [...].

3SGM.NOM get.3SG.PST fork.NOM/DAT/AKK and purse.NOM/DAT/AKK to hand.

‘He took the fork and the purse in his hands.’

(Frisian, Hoekstra [2019: 151])

(40) ech krouch e beim Schlapp

1SG.NOM get.1SG.PST 3SGM.AKK at-DEF tuft

‘I grabbed his tuft.’

(Luxemburgish, Wörterbuch der Luxemburgischen Mundart, cit. in Lenz [2011: 2])

These examples are relevant because there are two meaning components in the grammaticalization history of ‘get’ that are important to understand the restrictions on the eventive recipient passive: (i) the decreasing agentivity of the active subject and (ii) the directedness towards the active subject of the physical or metaphorical transfer designated by ‘get’. Both features motivated the development of ‘get’ as an auxiliary of this type of passive: The decreasing agentivity makes room for an initiator of the transfer that is not the subject – the passive ‘by’-agent –, and the inherent directedness in the meaning of ‘get’ licenses past participles designating transfers directed from the non-subject agent towards the subject recipient. Accordingly, each proto-recipient in the examples in (35)–(38) is not the initiator of the event, and each event is one of a transfer that is directed from a causer-agent to a real recipient. These examples are therefore prototypical examples of the eventive recipient passive. Only in languages where the grammaticalization of ‘get’ has advanced further there are also past participles lacking the directedness of the transfer towards the recipient, e.g., in predicates with privative meanings (41)–(44) in which the transfer is directed away from the recipient, against the inherent semantics of (lexical) ‘get’.

(41) Ich kriege einen Zahn gezogen.

1SG.NOM get.1SG.PRS DET.AKK.SG tooth pull.PTCP out.PTC

‘I get a tooth pulled out.’

(German)

(42) Jeg fik trukket en tand ud. (Danish)

1SG.NOM get.1SG.PST pull.PTCP DET.AKK.SG tooth out.PTCP

‘I got a tooth pulled out.’

(Danish)

(43) *Zij kreeg het boek afgepakt.

3SGF.NOM get.3SG.PST DEF.NOM/AKK book take.PTCP

intended: ‘She got the book taken.’

(Dutch, Bruikhuis et al. [2015: 448])

(44) Ech krut en Zant gezunn.

1SG.NOM get.1SG.PST DET.NOM/AKK tooth pull.PTCP

,I got a tooth pulled out.’

(Luxemburgish, Fabienne Gilbertz, p.c.)

In less grammaticalized recipient passives the proto-recipient must be a real recipient (45). The more the construction gets grammaticalized (– a case in point –) the less recipient restrictions are on the proto-recipient. This applies to cases in which there is no physical or metaphorical transfer meaning left in the lexical verb. This in turn loosens the restriction that the active verb be ditransitive, because a transferred theme is no longer required (46)–(47).

(45) *Zij kreeg bedankt.

3SGF.NOM/AKK get.3SG.PRS congratulate.PTCP

intended: ‘She got congratulated.’

(Dutch)

(46) %Sie kriegt/bekommt gratuliert.

3SGF.NOM/AKK get.3SG.PRS congratulate.PTCP

‘She is getting congratulated.’

(Standard German/West-Central German substandard)

(47) Si kritt gratuléiert.

3SGF.NOM/AKK get.3SG.PRS congratulate.PTCP

‘She is getting congratulated.’

(Luxemburgish, Fabienne Gilbertz, p.c.)

English is special in that ‘get’ in the passive construction has lost enough of its original meaning to license not only a proto-recipient’s but also a proto-patient’s foregrounding in the passive (48). (The same was already found with the ‘be’-passive in section 3.2.1. This means that both passive variants in English are patient passives and recipient passives at the same time.)

(48) The book got read.

DEF.NOM.SG get.3SG.PST read.PTCP

(English)

This does not mean that the active verb *get* is devoid of any agentive meaning components, even if it is used as a passive auxiliary, as (49) vs. (50) show (e.g., Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Biggs & Embick, 2020).

(49) He got married in order to get divorced.

(= subject referent intends to get divorced)

(50) He was shot to get him out of the way.

(= implied *by*-NP agent intends to get subject referent out of the way)

(English)

Because dative is the prototypical case for proto-recipients in Germanic, and because Icelandic and, for some verbs, Faroese can be argued to have dative subjects, these two languages may foreground proto-recipients as dative subjects using the ‘be’ auxiliary (51b), (52b) (Thráinsson, 2007; Thráinsson, et al. 2004). This sets them apart from any other modern Germanic language.

(51) a. Þeir hjálpuðu manninum.

3PL.NOM help.3PL.PST man-DEF.DAT.SGM

‘They helped the man.’

b. Manninum var hjálpað.

man-DEF.DAT.SGM be.3SG.PST help-PTCP.NOM.SGN

‘The man was helped.’

(Icelandic, Thráinsson [2007: 151])

- (52) a. Teir dugnaðu honum.
 3PL.NOM help.3PL.PRT 3SG.M.DAT
 ‘They helped him.’
- b. *Hann/Honum varð dugnað(ur)
 3SG.M.NOM/DAT be.3SG.PRT help.PTCP(SG.M)
 ‘He was helped.’


(Faroese, Thráinsson et al. 2004, 267)

In Faroese, there is a second remapping pattern with verbs governing dative objects in the active. With these verbs dative objects in the active are remapped as nominative subjects in the passive (53b).

- (53) a. Tey heilsaðu honum. (Faroese, Thráinsson et al. 2004, 268)
 3PL.NOM greet.3PL.PRT 3SG.M.DAT.
 ‘They greeted him.’
- b. Hann/*Honum varð heilsað(ur).
 He/*Honum was greeted.
 3SG.M.NOM/DAT be.3SG.PRT greet.PTCP(SG.M)
 ‘He was greeted.’

(Faroese, Thráinsson et al. 2004, 268)

In addition, there is the recipient passive with ‘get’ in both Icelandic and Faroese, in which the dative object from the active occurs as the nominative subject in the passive.

eventive recipient passive	active			passive		
SR 	PA	PR	%(...)	PR	(...)	PA
GF	SUB	OBJ1/IOBJ	%(...)	SUB	(...)	(POBJ)
CASE	nom	acc %gen (Ic) %dat (Ic, Fa)	%(...)	nom %dat (Ic, Fa) gen (Ic)	(...)	(‘by’ NP)

verbal complex	unmarked	analytic: AUX ^{get} + past participle AUX ^{be(come)} + past participle (Ic, Fa)
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Table 8: Eventive recipient passive

3.4 Backgrounding of proto-agents, foregrounding of proto-locationals: ↓PA/↑PL

3.4.1 ↓PA/↑PL: locational passive

In the locational passive (known as “pseudo-passive” or prepositional passive) the proto-agent from the active is demoted in the passive and the proto-locational from the active occurs as the passive subject. Since proto-locationals are expressed by prepositional objects in the active unless the path meaning component is incorporated in the verb, this means that in the passive the preposition is left “stranded” (54) (cf. Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Drummond & Kush, 2015).

- (54) a. We talked about the boy.
b. The boy was talked about.

(English)

As (55a) illustrates, English has a locational passive, although the restrictions are elusive regarding which verb with which preposition with which object allows the remapping of the object as a passive subject (55b) (cf. Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

- (55) a. This bed was slept in by George Washington.
b. *This river was slept beside.

(English, Huddleston & Pullum [2002: 1446])

Dutch, German, and other Germanic languages do not have locational passives of this sort (56).

- (56) *Hij werd lang over gesproken.
3SGM.NOM become.3SG.PST long about talk.PTCP
intended: ‘He was talked about for a long time.’

(Dutch, Bruikuis et al. [2015: 429])

The Scandinavian languages seemingly have a prepositional passive like the one in English, as exemplified by the Icelandic clause in (57).

(57) Þessu rúmi hefur (aldrei) verið sofð í.

this.DEF bed.DAT.SG have.3SG.PRS never be.PTCP sleep.PTCP in

‘This bed has never been slept in.’

(Icelandic, Thráinsson [2007: 154])

It has been argued, however, that in these languages the positionally foregrounded NP is not a subject, except for Norwegian (Maling & Zaenen, 1985). If one follows the argumentation, then the proto-locational is foregrounded only by dint of position (i.e., it is topicalized) but not in grammatical function. Consequently, the clause would not be a locational passive. This illustrates that a language may have stranded prepositions without allowing proto-locationals to be subjects in a passive clause. The details regarding syntactic argumentation are a matter of ongoing dispute (see also Hoekstra, 1995, on Frisian). Engdahl & Laanemets (2015) argue based on corpus data that Mainland Scandinavian languages do have real locational passives, although they are used very infrequently. Furthermore, they are preferably realized as synthetic and not as analytic passives (58).

(58) (så har många uttryckt att det är högt till tak på [...])


att ens idéer lyssnas på

that INDEF.GEN.SG idea.NOM.PL listen.PASS on

‘(so many have expressed that there is an open atmosphere at [...],) that one’s

ideas are listened to.’

(Swedish, Engdahl & Laanemets [2015: 305])

locational passive	active			passive		
SR 	PA	(...)	PL	PL	(...)	PA
GF	SUB	(...)	POBJ	SUB	(...)	(POBJ)
CASE	nom	(...)	PP	nom	(...)	(‘by’ NP)
verbal complex	unmarked			analytic: AUX ^{‘be(come)’} + past participle AUX _{get} (English)		

		AUX _{bl(ve)} (MSc)
		synthetic (MSc)

Table 9: Eventive recipient passive

3.5 Foregrounding of proto-locationals, backgrounding of proto-patients: $\uparrow PL/\downarrow PP$

3.5.1 $\uparrow PL/\downarrow PP$: location/possession alternation

In the “location/possession alternation” (also known as “dative alternation”) the grammatical encoding of the proto-locational in a physical or metaphorical transfer relation alternates between two clauses (Table 10). Each clause has two objects. Prototypically, the theme (= transferred) object is encoded as OBJ2/DOBJ in both clauses. The other, the proto-locational (source, location, goal), object is encoded as OBJ1/IOBJ in the “double object clause” and as POBJ in the “prepositional object clause”. The lexical verb is marked identically between clauses (59)–(61).


location/possession alternation	prepositional object clause			double object clause		
SR 	PA	PP	PL	PA	PL(\rightarrow PR)	PP
GF	SUB	OBJ2/DOBJ	POBJ	SUB	OBJ1/IOBJ	OBJ2/DOBJ
CASE	nom	acc dat	PP _{source/} location/goal	nom	acc dat	acc dat
verbal complex	unmarked			unmarked		

Table 10: Location/possession alternation

- (59) a. My cousin sold me this car/*it.
 b. My cousin sold this car/it to me.

(English)

- (60) a. De man heeft zijn broer een boek verkocht.
 DEF man has his brother.DAT/AKK DET book.DAT/AKK sold
 ‘The man sold his brother a book.’
 b. De man heeft een boek aan zijn broer verkocht.
 DEF man has DET book.DAT/AKK to his brother sold
 ‘The man sold a book to his brother.’

(Dutch, Colleman [2009: 595])

- (61) a. Hann seldi bóndanum kúnna.
 He sold farmer-DEF.DAT cow-DEF.ACC
 ‘He sold the farmer the cow.’
- b. Hann seldi kúnna til bóndan.
 He sold cow-DEF.ACC to farmer-DEF

(Faroese, Galbraith [2019: 100–101])

One of the most discussed questions with respect to this type of alternation is which verb may occur in which of the two clause patterns and why (e.g., Gropen et al., 1989; Levin, 1993; Wunderlich, 1997; Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 2005; Rappaport-Hovav & Levin, 2008; Bresnan et al., 2007; Coleman, 2009; Croft 2012; Kasper 2015). Several factors have been discussed that are supposed to govern whether a verb participates in the alternation. The most important factors are the following: (i) syntactic constraints, (ii) processing efficiency, (iii) information structure (givenness/newness of the objects), and, of course, (iv) the lexical meaning of the verb (and preposition) and the constructional meaning of the alternant clause patterns.

(i) As the English example (59) shows, there are syntactic restrictions relating to the syntactic categories of the objects. Another formal factor is the presence of separable verb particles, different types of which favor one of the alternants (e.g., Herslund, 1986, on Danish; Coleman, 2009, 2010, on Dutch). Such restrictions do not necessarily hold in all Germanic languages but are mostly language-specific.

(ii) Speakers tend to produce the “heavier” object last, i.e. the object that is syntactically more complex, or simply longer (e.g., Arnold et al., 2000). This unburdens working memory in language production, since it minimizes dependency relations.

(iii) Speakers choose the diathetical variant that fit their information-structural needs. For instance, speakers of English and German use the double object construction (i.e., proto-recipient > proto-patient order) when the proto-recipient is information-structurally given and the proto-patient old (e.g., Collins, 1995; De Vaere et al. 2018). When the information-structural status of the roles is reversed, speakers prefer the prepositional object construction. Note that this factor also correlates with the objects’ definiteness (old: +definite) and pronominality (old: +pronoun). There are well-known ordering preferences definite > indefinite and pronoun > noun (see also Bresnan et al., 2007).

(iv) Factors (i)–(iii) make hardly any reference to the inherent meaning of the verbs and the constructions. If those factors captured all the relevant restrictions on the alternation, then one would expect that the double object construction and prepositional object construction are equally well possible with any verb that fits at least one of the constructions, anything else being equal. This is not the case, however. In every language there are verbs that fit well in both constructions, besides verbs that are more common in one of the two constructions, and verbs that occur in one but not the other construction. This shows that each of the two clause patterns contributes its own schematic meaning and that a particular verb’s meaning may be more or less well compatible, or not at all compatible, with this schematic meaning (cf. Goldberg 1995). The further a verb deviates from the prototypical meaning, the less probable it fits in the construction.

- double object construction, default interpretation: ‘cause causes proto-recipient to lose/have/get control of proto-patient’

The verbs fitting best in this construction are the Germanic ‘give’ variants combined with an inanimate proto-patient and a human proto-recipient. If incompatible with the default meaning, the lexical verb and complements inserted in the construction may either (i) semantically enforce (\rightarrow_s) a “downgraded” meaning or (ii) be impossible in this construction.

downgrading parameters:

causer-agent[-animate] \rightarrow_s cause

PR[-animate] \rightarrow_s PL

PR[-animate], PP [-animate, -alienable] \rightarrow_s whole/part-relation

(62) gives an example from German where such a downgrade to a part/whole relation is enforced.

- (62) Ich habe dem Auto einen Spoiler spendiert.
 1SG.NOM have DEF.DAT car DET.AKK spoiler given
 ‘I have given the car a spoiler.’

(German)

- prepositional object construction, default interpretation: ‘cause causes proto-patient to move to/be in the vicinity of/come from PL’

Among the verbs fitting well in this construction are the Germanic ‘send (to)’ variants combined with a mobile proto-patient and a relatively unspecified proto-locational.¹⁶ If incompatible with the default meaning, the lexical verb and complements inserted in the construction may either (i) be impossible with this construction, (ii) semantically enforce an “upgraded” meaning (\rightarrow_s), or (iii) make available (without implicating or implying) an upgraded meaning (\rightarrow_p):

implicature:

cause[+animate] \rightarrow_p causer-agent

upgrading / making available, but neither implying nor implicating:

PL[+animate] $\rightarrow_{s/p}$ PR

(‘cause causes proto-recipient to lose/have/get control over proto-patient’)

PL [-animate], theme [-animate, -alienable] $\rightarrow_{s/p}$ whole/part-relation

(‘cause causes whole to get/have/lose part’)

(63) gives an example from English where such an upgraded interpretation is possible but not semantically enforced. Harry may be interpreted as the intended destination of the sending, but it is also possible that he’s already in control of the postcard.

(63) I sent a postcard to Harry.

(English)

The downgraded meaning of the double object construction is close to the default meaning of the prepositional object construction but still more specific: It predicates the completion of the transfer, while the proto-patient is only predicated to be ‘on its way’ in the prepositional object construction.

The Germanic languages differ in the degree to which the double object constructions and prepositional object constructions “tolerate” verbs that deviate from the prototypical

¹⁶ Note that these verbs must not be particle verbs for syntactic reasons (among factor [i], e.g., Coleman, 2009).

construction meanings in certain semantic aspects. A semantic-pragmatic treatment of the alternation accounts for many restrictions. A well-known example is that inanimate proto-locational from the prepositional object construction cannot be “upgraded” to proto-recipients in double object constructions unless they are metonymic or anthropomorphized (‘send Honolulu a postcard’). In contrast, the reverse downgrade of a proto-recipient from a double object construction to a proto-locational in a prepositional object construction is unproblematic (‘send a postcard to Harry’). A few examples follow where variation comes in due to the peculiarities of the verb semantics vis-à-vis constructional semantics (64)–(70):

- (64) They gave the book to the buyer. (English)
- (65) De gav bogen til køberen. (Danish)
they gave book-DEF to buyer-DEF
- (66) Zej gaven het boek (af) aan de koper. (Dutch)
they gave DEF book off.PTC to DEF buyer
- (67) ?/*Si hunn d’Buch un de Keefer ginn. (Luxembourgish)
they have DEF book to DEF buyer given
- (68) *Sie gaben das Buch zu dem Käufer. (German)
they gave DEF book to DEF buyer
- (69) dass sie das Buch an den Käufer %(ab/weiter)gaben. (German)
that they DEF book to DEF buyer off/further.PTC-gave
- (70) *þeir gáfu bókina til kaupandans. (Icelandic)
they gave book-DEF to buyer-DEF
‘They gave the book to the buyer.’

Although verbs like ‘give’ and ‘show’ seem to imply completed transfers, i.e., the proto-recipient having and seeing the proto-patient, respectively, they are available in the prepositional object construction in English, Danish, and Dutch, but not in Luxembourgish, German and Icelandic. (69) shows that if a German verb particle and preposition indicating directed motion is added, the prepositional object construction becomes available (see factor [i]). These languages differ in whether they allow ‘give’ to lexically override the prepositional object construction’s meaning component ‘directed motion (of the proto-patient to the proto-locational)’ by ‘(the proto-recipient’s) actual control (of the proto-patient)’.

Verbs of ballistic motion like ‘throw’ or ‘shoot’ do not presuppose the proto-patient’s reaching its destination. It is therefore expected that they fit prepositional object constructions

well, while languages should differ in whether they allow them in double object constructions. As (71) and (72) show, such verbs are possible in English and Luxembourgish double object constructions, while they are impossible in, for instance, Dutch (73), Icelandic (74), and German double object constructions. Note, however, that in English and Luxembourgish the clauses do not entail that the proto-patient actually reached the proto-locational/recipient, but only that it moved towards its intended destination. Granted that the two alternating constructions still have different central meanings, these data suggest that the verbs seem to have an incorporated path meaning component in languages like English and Luxembourgish.

(71) The ship threw him a rope but it did not reach Adilang.¹⁷ (English)

(72) Si schéisst dem Mann de Ball. (Luxembourgish; Fabienne Gilbertz, p.c.)

she shoot DEF man DEF ball

‘She played the man the ball.’

(73) *Ze gooide hem de bal. (Dutch)

she threw him DEF ball

intended: ‘She threw him the ball.’

(74) *hún kastaði dómaramum boltanum. (Icelandic)

she threw referee-DEF ball-DEF

intended: ‘She threw the referee the ball.’

Each of the two constructions has a central sense and there are prototypical verbs that fit the central meaning. Deviations from the central meanings can be classified by the semantic dimensions of the deviation. These dimensions include the following (e.g., Goldberg 1995, Croft 2012): obligation (e.g., ‘promise’, ‘owe’), refusal (e.g., ‘refuse’, ‘deny’), future transfer (e.g., ‘leave’, ‘reserve’), enablement (e.g., ‘permit’, ‘allow’), information (e.g., ‘say’, ‘tell’), and obtaining (e.g., ‘get’, ‘take’). The implication seems to be this: Germanic languages vary as to whether they allow a verb in one of the two constructions that deviates from the central meaning of the respective construction. For each Germanic language, if one of the two constructions allows a verb that deviates to a certain degree from their respective central meanings in one of the dimensions above, then they also allow a verb that deviates less from the respective central meanings in that dimension, and of course they allow verbs representing the central meaning itself.

¹⁷ URL: <<https://www.newsmax.com/thewire/teen-sea-bible-indonesia/2018/09/24/id/883077/>> [Nov. 18, 2021]

3.5.2 Further diatheses of this type

Further diatheses foregrounding proto-locationals and backgrounding proto-patients include the location/affection alternation. It comes with several sub-types like the so-called “locative”, or “applicative”, alternation (75)–(76) and what can be called the “location/benefaction” alternation (77), both of which are subject to particular restrictions (cf. Krifka, 1989; Levin, 1993; Levin & Rappaport-Hovav, 2005; Beavers, 2006, 2010; Bosse, 2011; Kasper, 2015)

(75) a. Han fyldte bøger i kassen.

3SG.M.SBJ fill.3SG.PST book.PL.DOBJ into box-DEF

‘He filled books into the box.’

b. Han fyldte kassen med bøger.

3SG.M.SBJ fill.3SG.PST box-DEF.DOBJ with book.PL

‘He filled the box with books.’

(Herslund, cit. in Beavers [2006: 61])

(76) a. Han kaster sne på døren.

3SG.M.SBJ throw.3SG.PRS snow.DOBJ on door-DEF

‘He throws snow on the door.’

b. #Han kaster døren med sne.

3SG.M.SBJ throw.3SG.PRS door-DEF.DOBJ with snow

‘He throws the door with snow.’

(Danish, Christensen & Wallentin [2011: 1623])

(77) a. Sie kochten / kauften / *überraschten Involtini für ihre Eltern.

3PL.F.SBJ cook/buy/surprise.3PL.PST involtini.DOBJ for DEF parents.PL

‘They cooked involtini for their parents.’

b. Sie bekochten / *bekauften / überraschten ihre Eltern mit Involtini.

3PL.F.SBJ APPL-cook/-buy/surprise.3PL.PST POSS parents.PL.DOBJ with involtini

‘They cooked their parents involtini.’

(German)

What these alternations have in common with the location/possession alternation is that (i) there are complex interactions between schematic meanings of clause patterns and specific verb

meanings, (ii) the “location” clauses in the respective alternations show less restrictions with respect to the lexical semantics of the proto-roles, (iii) the “location” clauses in the respective alternations (the (a) examples) give rise to inferred “upgraded” meanings of either the proto-patient or the proto-locational towards proto-recipients based on animacy (as in (77b)), (iv) each alternant clause pattern has inherent semantic properties that the other lacks, and (v) the Germanic languages differ in the degree to which they allow verbs in these constructions whose meanings deviate from the inherent meaning of the clause pattern along certain dimensions (e.g., Michaelis & Ruppenhofer, 2000, 2001); languages allowing verbs in the constructions that deviate stronger from the central meanings of the constructions also allow verbs that deviate less strong from the central construction meanings, but not vice versa. These alternations differ from the location/possession alternation in that the referential features of the non-subject participants, i.e. their animacy, individuation, solidity, shape, etc., govern these alternations more strongly, as examples (2) and (3) in section 2.2 illustrate.

3.6 Major diatheses not considered

There is a wide range of alternations that fall under the definition of diathesis given in section 2.1 but cannot be considered in this article. Many of them are productive, others are not. The latter have largely gone unnoticed in the literature. In a pioneering study Cysouw (2021) – using a broader definition than the one given in section 2.1 – lists about 250 diatheses in German, 75 of which he considers frequent or productive enough to deserve mentioning in a grammar of German (Cysouw, 2021, chapter 3 and p.c.). Regarding major diatheses that could not be discussed in this article, Table 11 gives an all to brief sample of diathetical alternations in Germanic that are either frequently used or productive or both. Some of them, like analytic causatives and transitive applicatives, come with several sub-types.

Fore-/back-grounding pattern	designation	example
↑PA/↓non-PA	analytic causatives	a. Iemand het hierdie huis gebou. ‘Someone built this house.’ b. My oom het hierdie huis laat bou. ‘My uncle had this house built.’ <div style="text-align: right;">(Afrikaans)</div>

↑PL/↓PP	completion alternation (also antipassive)	a. Jens malte et bilde. 'Jens painted a picture.' b. Jens malte på et bilde. 'Jens painted at a picture.' (Swedish)
↑PL/↓PP	conative alternation (also antipassive)	a. Er schlug ihn. 'He hit him.' b. Er schlug nach ihm. 'He hit at him.' (German)
↑PL/↓PP	transitive applicatives (also antipassive)	a. Jan spreekt over het probleem. Jan talks about the problem. 'Jan talks about the problem.' b. Jan bespreekt het probleem. Jan APPL-talks the problem 'He discusses the problem.' (Dutch)
see I. in section 2.2	partitive alternation	see (1)
see V. in section 2.2	symmetrical verb alternation	see (5)

Table 11: Major diatheses not considered

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