

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

# The Passive

A Comparative Linguistic Analysis

Anna Siewierska





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## The Passive

First published in 1984, *The Passive* surveys a wide range of different constructions, which have all been termed 'passives' by linguists, using data from a large number of genetically and typologically diverse languages. Chapter 1 raises questions about the nature of passives and exposes some of the difficulties inherent in the traditional assumptions. Chapter 2 examines the 'personal passive' and includes a discussion on the relationship between the passive and transitivity. Chapter 3 to 5 deal with impersonal, periphrastic and reflexive passives, exploring the varied problems raised by each construction and focusing particularly on English and Southeast Asian languages. The two final chapters look at various attempts to explain exceptions to the passive in both semantic and syntactic terms, with an additional section on pragmatics. This book will appeal to all of those involved in the field of comparative linguistics.



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# **The Passive**

## **A Comparative Linguistic Analysis**

**Anna Siewierska**



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## EDITORIAL STATEMENT

CROOM HELM LTD are publishing a Linguistics Series under the joint editorship of James Hurford (University of Edinburgh) and John Hawkins (Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistik). These editors wish to draw this series to the attention of scholars, who are invited to submit manuscripts to Jim Hurford or to John Hawkins. Following is a statement of editorial intent.

The series will not specialise in any one area of language study, nor will it limit itself to any one theoretical approach. Synchronic and diachronic descriptive studies, either syntactic, semantic, phonological or morphological, will be welcomed, as will more theoretical 'model-building' studies, and studies in sociolinguistics or psycholinguistics. The criterion for acceptance will be quality and potential contribution to the relevant field. All monographs published must advance our understanding of the nature of language in areas of substantial interest to major sectors of the linguistic research community. Traditional scholarly standards, such as clarity of presentation, factual and logical soundness of argumentation and a thorough and reasoned orientation to other relevant work, must also be adhered to. Within these indispensable limitations we welcome the submission of creative and original contributions to the study of language.

James R. Hurford, Department of Linguistics, University of Edinburgh, Adam Ferguson Building, George Square, Edinburgh EH8 9LL. John A. Hawkins, Max-Planck-Institut für Psycholinguistik, Berg en Dalseweg 79, NL-6522 BC, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

I would like to dedicate this book to  
my parents, Jadwiga and Henryk Siewierscy.

## PREFACE

This book is a revised version of my Monash University M.A. thesis written in 1979. The work was motivated by the general interest in typological studies prevalent at that time. It does not therefore purport to illustrate the problems relating to passive occurrence in any individual language or suggest how the passive should be handled within particular grammatical frameworks. Rather it sets out to exemplify the range of structures which have been called passive and the problems which these structures pose for a unified definition of the passive.

I have not altered the basic structure of the original thesis, although I have included in the discussion the more recent works on the passive. The only major revision is the addition of chapter seven on the pragmatics of the passive where the discussion is mostly confined to European languages.

There are a number of people who have been of great assistance to me in the writing of the original thesis and the preparation of this book. I am particularly indebted to Barry Blake for his constant help and guidance over a long period. It will be obvious from what follows how much I have benefited from his expertise in the field of typological studies. Special thanks are also due to Bernard Comrie for commenting on earlier drafts and suggesting that I prepare a revised version of the thesis and to my friend and colleague Keith Allan for his continual help and encouragement. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the members of the Linguistic Department at Monash University past and present who provided me with helpful comments and moral support, namely Göran Hammarström, John Platt, Peter Paul, Graham Mallinson, Ian R. Smith, Stephen R. Johnson, Stephen Paterson, Christopher

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Anna Siewierska



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

A	transitive subject
abl	ablative
abs	absolutive
acc	accusative
act	active/actor
al	allative
an	animate
ant	anterior
a/p	antipassive
aor	aorist
apl	applicative
appl	applied
art	article
asp	aspect
aux	auxiliary
ben	benefactive
cau	causative
cho	chômeur
cl	class
cl. int	clause introducer
clf	classifier
comp	complementizer
compl	completive
D	dummy/determiner
dat	dative
dec	declarative
det	determiner
erg	ergative
excl	exclusive
f	feminine
foc	focus
fut	future
gen	genitive
gl	goal
hyp	hypothetical
imp	impersonal/imperative

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

inan	inanimate
ind	indicative
inf	infinitive
inst	instrumental
intr	intransitive
loc	locative
m	masculine
man	manner
n	neuter
N	noun
nom	nominative
NP	noun phrase
obl	oblique
P	direct object/preposition/predicate
part	participle
partit	partitive
p. part	past participle
pass	passive
pass. part	passive participle
perf	perfective
pl	plural
poss	possessive
PP	prepositional phrase
pres	present
prog	progressive
prop	proper
purp	purposive
refl	reflexive
RG	relational grammar
S	intransitive subject
s	singular
t	tense
t/asp	tense/aspect
top	topic
tr	transitive
V	verb
vb.m	verb marker
VP	verb phrase
1	first person / subject
2	second person / direct object
3	third person / indirect object
*	ungrammatical
!	ungrammatical in the relevant sense
?	of doubtful grammaticality or acceptability
>	takes precedence over
∅	zero (form)
-	morpheme boundary, boundary between glosses
:	joins elements of a gloss

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 General Aims

Within the last ten years a significant amount of work has been carried out on cross-language morpho-syntactic variation, particularly case marking, word order, relativization, causativization and topicalization strategies. Studies in this area have revealed that well documented language phenomena have not, in fact, been sufficiently researched and many of the properties traditionally associated with these phenomena may not hold cross-linguistically. The passive is a case in point.

The analysis of the various constructions referred to in the literature as *passive* leads to the conclusion that there is not even one single property which all these constructions have in common. In order to determine the cross-language characteristic of passive clauses and examine the relationship between the passive and other related structures, we will survey a wide variety of constructions called passive from many different languages.

The passive constructions discussed will be classified along three parameters: personal/impersonal, periphrastic/synthetic and plain/reflexive. This classification of passive clauses is based on their morpho-syntactic properties i.e. verbal marking, case marking and presence or absence of an overt subject. Various other classifications based on different properties of passive clauses have been used in the literature. For instance, passives have been grouped into stative and nonstative on the basis of whether they involve a state or an action. This is primarily a semantic division. However, it may be also reflected in the syntax. In addition, passives have been classified into agentive, quasi-agentive and agentless in terms of whether they can

## INTRODUCTION

or cannot occur with an agent.

The discussion of the passive will be aimed at determining what, in fact, constitutes a passive. We hope to demonstrate that the existing definitions are too broad, in the sense that they encompass too diverse a range of structures or conversely too narrow a range and thus exclude constructions of a similar type. Therefore, a compromise solution will be attempted which entails restricting the term *passive* in a way that enables a definition to be made.

In view of the fact that the term *passive* is primarily associated with the personal passive, chapter two will be devoted to a survey of the properties of the personal passive. Chapter three will deal with the more controversial impersonal passive. In chapter four the periphrastic passive will be discussed in the context of the status of the passive auxiliary and past participle. Chapter five will be devoted to the reflexive passive with special emphasis on the problem of distinguishing reflexive passives from other constructions containing a reflexive morpheme. In chapter six attempts at handling exceptions to the passive in terms of the notions *activity*, *result*, and *volition* will be evaluated. The final chapter will centre on the two main pragmatic functions of the passive, namely topicalization and impersonalization.

The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with presenting the different types of passive clauses to be discussed, briefly outlining the controversy over how passive clauses should be treated in a grammar, introducing the problem of the relation between the passive and transitivity, and finally evaluating the status of the passive and transitivity as language universals.

### 1.1. The Passive

#### 1.1.1 Different Type of Passive Constructions

The term *passive* has been used to cover a wide variety of constructions in many different languages. Under the most widely accepted definition of the passive, passive constructions have the following characteristics:

- a) the subject of the passive clause is a direct object in the corresponding active
- b) the subject of the active clause is expressed in the passive in the form of an agentive

## INTRODUCTION

- adjunct or is left unexpressed  
c) the verb is marked passive.

As the above characteristics commonly attributed to passive constructions show, passive constructions have been defined *vis-à-vis* active constructions and thus regarded as a deviation from the syntactic norm. Syntactically they may differ from actives in word order, case marking, verbal morphology and in the appearance of some additional word or particle. Active and passive clauses also typically differ in the pragmatic function of the agent and patient. The agent in the most basic type of active declarative clause is usually the topic i.e. the constituent which states what the clause is primarily about and sets the individual framework within which the sentence holds.<sup>1</sup> In the overwhelming majority of languages it appears in initial position in the clause and in most cases conveys *given* or *old* information. In a typical passive clause on the other hand the patient is the topic while the agent, if present, represents *new* information and bears the main information focus indicated by tonic stress.

Despite the overt differences between actives and passives, both constructions in the majority of instances express the same propositional content. The NPs in the two constructions are generally viewed as having the same semantic roles. Both in (1a) and (1b) below John is the agent and book the patient.

- (1) a. John bought the book.  
b. The book was bought by John.

The term *passive* is not only used for clauses such as (1b) where the subject corresponds to a patient in the active, but also for clauses with subjects corresponding to: recipient, benefactive, source, instrumental, locative, temporal, manner and causal NPs.

Clauses which lack an overt subject, such as the following from Dutch (2a) (Kirsner 1976) and Ute (3a) (Givón 1981), are called passive too.

- (2) a. Er werd door de vrouw gegild  
there become by the woman scream:p.part  
'There was screaming by the woman'.  
3) a. Tayúci - gyay 'apúga - ta - xa  
eloquence - have speak - pass - ant  
'There was eloquent speaking'.

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In the Dutch clause the subject position is occupied by what is commonly known as a dummy pronoun. This dummy pronoun is not present in the corresponding active (2b).

- (2) b. De vrouw glide  
the woman scream:past  
'The woman screamed'.

The Ute clause consists of a verb in the third person singular with an incorporated manner adverb. The closest corresponding active, as in the Dutch example, is an intransitive clause.

- (3) b. Ta' wa' - ci tayuci - gyay 'apağa qa  
man - S/A eloquence - have speak ant  
'The man spoke eloquently'.

In addition, clauses which have no corresponding actives, such as the German (4a) and English (5), are also referred to by some as passive.

- (4) a. Der Tisch ist gedeckt  
the table is lay:p.part  
'The table is laid'.

- (5) John grew more and more frightened.

The German clause (4a) denotes a state, not an action. The English translation does not show this well, for in English a clause similar to (4a) can be interpreted both statively and dynamically. This is not the case in German. (4b) is not the active counterpart of (4a) in German.

- (4) b. Jemand deckte den Tisch  
someone lay:past:3s the table  
'Someone laid the table'.

The above examples of passive clause clearly indicate that there is a significant amount of disagreement over what constitutes a passive. It is thus not surprising that there is a similar disagreement over how passives should be treated in a grammar.

### 1.1.2 The Passive and Different Models of Grammar

Although passive clauses differ from actives both syntactically and pragmatically, the common semantic properties which they display have led linguists

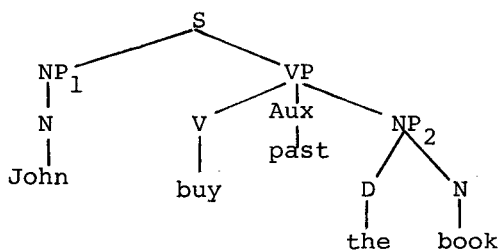
## INTRODUCTION

to claim that there is a strong relationship between the two constructions.

The relationship between actives and passives has been widely discussed both in traditional grammar and modern linguistics. However, it was only when language began to be generally viewed in terms of a multi-level theory of clause structure that the expression of the relationship between actives and passives became a major theoretical issue. In fact, the theories of grammar which have dominated linguistics in the last twenty odd years: Transformational Grammar (TG) in its various guises including Relational Grammar (RG) (Perlmutter and Postal 1977, 1978, 1983a,b) and Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan 1978, 1982a,b), as well as the particular models of Case Grammar (Fillmore 1968, 1977; J. Anderson 1977; Starosta 1976, 1978) and Functional Grammar, (Dik 1978, 1980) have evolved out of different approaches to passive constructions.

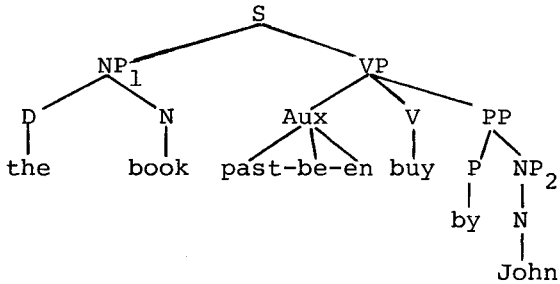
Broadly speaking, it is possible to distinguish between structurally based and relationally based approaches to the passive. Linguists such as Chomsky (1957, 1965, 1973), Jacobs and Rosenbaum (1968), Emonds (1972, 1976), Langacker and Munro (1975) and Hoard (1979) who advocate the first approach, maintain that it is possible to relate active and passive clauses in terms of changes induced in their constituent structure i.e. linear order and dominance relations<sup>2</sup>. Under the first version of TG, for example, active and passive clauses such as (1a,b) were assigned distinct structures, namely (1c,d).

(1) c.



INTRODUCTION

d.

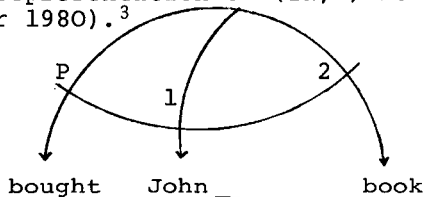


The two constructions were said to be related by a passive transformation which:

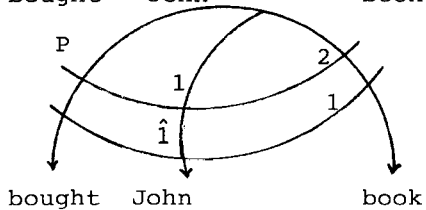
- a) permutes NP<sub>1</sub> and NP<sub>2</sub>
- b) inserts the discontinuous auxiliary element be+en
- c) inserts the element by to the left of the permuted NP<sub>1</sub>

Advocates of Case Grammar and RG hold that the relationship between actives and passives is best "explained" with reference not to constituent structure, but changes in the grammatical relations between NPs and their verbs. Thus in RG (Perlmutter and Postal 1977), for instance, the passive is said to be a relational changing rule which promotes a direct object to subject and simultaneously demotes the former subject to an oblique position in the clause or deletes it. Clauses in RG are represented by a network of stratified, labeled arcs. The simplified relational representation of (1a,b) is shown in (1e,f) (Perlmutter 1980).<sup>3</sup>

(1) e.



f.



The numerals 1 and 2 stand for subject and direct



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object respectively which together with the indirect object are regarded as linguistic primitives in RG and are referred to as *terms*. NPs other than the terms such as locatives, instrumentals, benefactives etc. are referred to as *non-terms* or obliques. The symbol ^ over a term indicates that the particular NP has been demoted by the operation of syntactic rules and is called a *chômeur*.<sup>4</sup> In the active (1e) John is a "1" and the book a "2". As a result of the passive, the NP which was a "2" in the first stratum (level) is promoted to "1" in the second stratum, while the original "1" becomes a *chômeur*  $\hat{1}$ .

Among both groups of linguists opinions are again divided on whether the relationship between actives and passives, be it structural or in terms of grammatical relations, should be expressed in the syntactic component of a grammar or in the lexicon. The main problem thus centres on the question of whether actives and passives should be related by means of syntactic or lexical rules. Linguists who hold the former view propose to derive passives from:

- a) structures identical or similar to actives (Chomsky 1965, 1973; Burt 1971; Jacobs and Rosenbaum 1968)
- b) structures containing actives (Bouton 1973; Fiengo 1974; Hasagawa 1968; Hoard 1979; Lakoff 1971; Langacker and Munro 1975)
- c) both from some other abstract source (Emonds 1972, 1976; Fillmore 1968, 1971).

Proponents of the other position such as Brame (1976) Bresnan (1978), Friedin (1975a), Horn (1981), Mchombo (1980), Shopen (1972) and Starosta (1978) claim that passive constructions should be generated directly. They contend that the regularities between the two constructions can best be expressed in terms of lexical entries for the verbs and the synonymy between actives and passives by means of lexical rules not syntactic transformations. Yet other linguists such as Wasow (1977), Lightfoot (1979) and Bennett (1980) maintain that some passive clauses should be derived transformationally and other passive clauses lexically.

All the turbulent discussions on the passive have been carried out primarily in the context of arguments for or against different models of grammar and consequently no conclusions on the best way of treating the passive have been reached. The focus

## INTRODUCTION

of attention has been on the model of grammar not on the construction itself. The very opposite approach will be adopted here, the chief concern being not the actual way that passive clauses should be handled in a grammar, but determining what a passive construction is.

### 1.2 Transitivity and the Passive

Even a superficial look at the linguistic literature reveals that the term *passive* is frequently coupled with another linguistic notion, namely *transitivity*. In fact the two notions are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to speak about one without mentioning the other.

The passive and transitivity have been discussed in relation to two main problems. The first is connected with establishing which active clauses may have passive counterparts or to use transformational terminology the structural conditions under which passivization may take place. For the majority of linguists the determining factor is transitivity. In other words it is claimed that if a clause is transitive it can be passivized. The second problem concerns the recent controversy on the transitive/intransitive status of passive clauses (Givón 1981; Hopper and Thompson 1980; Perlmutter and Postal 1978, 1983b). Generally speaking it has not been the custom to comment on the transitivity or intransitivity of the passive. The intransitivity of this construction has simply been taken for granted. Recent work on linguistic typology has brought into question this assumption with respect to passive clauses in some languages.

As both of the above mentioned problems have a direct bearing on the definition of the passive, in order to appreciate the issues involved, it is first necessary to discuss what is meant by the term *transitive*.

We will begin with the traditional morpho-syntactic approaches to transitivity and show how the very definition of transitivity is indirectly dependent on the passive. Next we will deal with Hopper and Thompson's (1980) recent discourse-orientated treatment of transitivity which in contrast to the former approaches does not rely on the passive. The discussion in later chapters will reveal that this definition of transitivity entails abandoning the claim that all passive clauses are intransitive.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.2.1 Transitivity and Morpho-syntax

Since the notion of transitivity is universally recognized it seems that a good definition should be readily available. Ironically enough the terms *transitive/intransitive* have not as yet been satisfactorily defined.

In most cases the notion of transitivity is simply taken for granted. Those who do attempt to present a definition usually provide something along the following lines. A transitive verb is a verb which takes a direct object and an intransitive verb a verb which does not. When asked what is a direct object they most probably will say that it is an object of a transitive verb (Brown and Miller 1980; Jespersen 1926; Poutsma 1926). Linguists who use some form of this definition sometimes supplement it with semantic criteria, for instance that the verb must express a genuine action that passes over from the subject to the direct object. In addition the direct object may be said to be the NP the referent of which is somehow affected (often physically) as a consequence of the action expressed by the verb. Despite the obvious circularity of all of these arguments, this is the most widely accepted definition of transitivity.

In practice of course linguists have found it possible to identify a subject and a direct object and thus classify a verb as transitive on the basis of word order and/or surface morphology.

It is generally recognized that languages tend to place subjects and direct objects in distinct clausal positions and/or mark either one or the other (or occasionally both) by distinct affixes or adpositions. For example in Polish, it is possible to identify the verb zabić in (6) as transitive, because it has the semantic properties of a transitive verb and the preverbal nominal - myśliwy - is in the nominative case, while the postverbal nominal - niedźwiedzia - is in the accusative case.

- (6) Myśliwy                    zabił                    niedźwiedzia  
gamekeeper:nom kill:past bear:acc  
'The gamekeeper killed the bear'.

The verb widzieć 'to see' in (7) can similarly be identified as a transitive verb (and the clause as transitive). Although it does not fulfil the semantic criteria of transitivity (the verb does not

## INTRODUCTION

express an action in the traditional sense and the object is therefore unlikely to be affected), the NPs which accompany it are in the nominative and accusative cases.

- (7) Myśliwy                    widział niedźwiedzia  
gamekeeper:nom    see:past bear:acc  
'The gamekeeper saw the bear'.

In the majority of languages, as in Polish, morphological marking, word order and semantic properties may be used as tests for transitivity.

However, the morphological marking of NPs does not always correlate with their syntactic behaviour, more specifically, with their behaviour under passivization. Passivization is the second most widely accepted test for transitivity and direct objects. Under this analysis a NP is regarded as a direct object and a clause as transitive if the NP can appear as the subject of a canonical passive construction. Consequently, the Polish (8a) is viewed as transitive although the postverbal NP is in the instrumental case and not the accusative case, because it has a corresponding passive (8b). The clause (9a) conversely is intransitive, despite the accusative case marking, due to the ungrammaticality of the corresponding passive.

- (8) a. Pan            Tadeusz            administrował  
Mr:nom Tadeusz:nom administer:past:3s  
majątkiem  
estate:instr  
'Mr Tadeusz administered the estate'.
- b. Majątek        był administrowany        przez  
estate:nom was administer:p.part by  
Pana            Tadeusza  
Mr              T  
'The estate was administered by Mr.  
Tadeusz'.
- (9) a. Beczka        waży                    dziesięć kg.  
Barrel:nom weigh:pres:3s ten:acc kg.  
'The barrel weighs ten kilograms'
- b. \*Dziesięć kilogramów jest ważonych  
ten:nom kg:nom are weigh:p.part  
przez beczkę  
by              barrel:acc  
(\*Ten kg. are weighed by the barrel).

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This so called transitivity test quite evidently is no less circular than the definitions of transitivity given earlier. Linguists who use passivization as a test for transitivity in fact find themselves in the paradoxical situation of defining passivization in terms of transitivity and transitivity in terms of passivization.

Unfortunately, most of the exponents of the dominant linguistic theories have adopted either the first or second "definition" of transitivity in one form or another. Linguists who adhere to a multi-level theory of clause structure usually manage to "disguise" their definition of transitivity in such a way that its resemblance to the above is obscured. Once they begin to deal with actual language data their true position is revealed. Consider, for instance, the definition of transitivity proposed by transformational grammarians and relational grammarians.

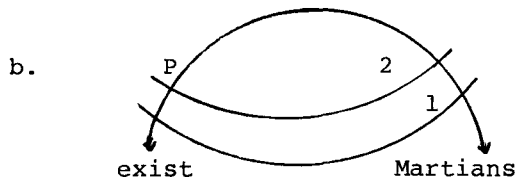
Proponents of TG have attempted to define subjects and direct objects and transitive and intransitive clauses on the basis of order and hierarchical dominance. They claim that a subject is 'the NP immediately dominated by S' (John in (1c)) and a direct object 'the NP immediately dominated by VP' (book in (1d)) (Chomsky 1965:71). Transitive clauses are those which have a subject and a direct object. This definition of transitivity and subjects and objects is carried out at the level of underlying structure, not surface structure. Consequently, it does not always identify as subject or object constituents which we would regard as such on the basis of morphological or syntactic criteria in other grammatical models. Moreover, the configurations postulated by Chomsky are not reflected in the surface structure of some languages. For instance, in VSO languages such as Polynesian languages like Tongan, Samoan, Maori or Pukapukan or the Celtic languages, the verb and its object are non-contiguous. Therefore, it is difficult to argue that the subject and object can be distinguished in terms of the dominance relations which Chomsky suggests. According to Chomsky's theory in languages like these both the subject and direct object have to be seen as being immediately dominated by "S". There is no structural difference between these NPs apart from their relative order with respect to the verb. Positioning relative to the verb cannot, however, be taken as the basis for defining subjects and direct objects, since the direct object of VOS and SOV languages would be grouped with the S of VSO.

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Furthermore, this criterion would be inapplicable to SVO languages. The problem posed by VSO languages and the difficulties encountered in establishing a definite order of dominance between all the constituents of a sentence (especially in the case of subordinate clauses) have severely undermined Chomsky's definition of transitivity.

Relational Grammarians, as mentioned above, avoid the problem of defining subjects and direct objects by taking these relations to be linguistic primitives. A direct object or "2" in the RG of Perlmutter and Postal (1977, 1978, 1983,a,b) is not viewed as the same kind of entity as in traditional grammar or TG. For most linguists a direct object is a NP which occurs with a transitive verb (whatever that may be), but only together with another NP - the subject. Direct objects may be unaccompanied by overt subjects in certain derived structures e.g. imperatives or impersonal passives (cf. discussion in ch.3), but never in basic clauses. In the RG of Perlmutter and Postal a "2" can occur with an intransitive verb. For instance, the English clause (10a) is regarded as derivative of (10b) where Martians is an underlying "2".

(10) a. Martians exist.



In both the underlying (10b) and surface (10a) the verb is intransitive, but in (10a) Martians is a subject while in (10b) it is a *direct object*. According to Perlmutter and Postal (1978:33), 'a stratum (level) is *transitive* if it contains both a "1"-arc and a "2"-arc as in (1e). A stratum is *intransitive* if and only if it contains either a "1"-arc or a "2"-arc (not both) as in (10b)'. Perlmutter and Postal (1978:31) claim that they have overcome the unclarity of former definitions of transitivity by introducing notions like 'head of "1"-arc' and 'head of "2"-arc' which are 'perfectly formal and precise'. Obviously they are not, for the arcs are only a means of representation of previously established relations between NPs and their verbs. Postal and Perlmutter like Chomsky have to rely on word order, morphological marking, syntactic

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properties and semantic characteristics to determine which NPs are "1s", "2s" and "3s".

In the above mentioned approaches to transitivity, the term has been defined with reference to NPs and VPs or subjects and objects. Attempts have also been made in the literature to describe clauses first of all in terms of the number of participants which obligatorily appear with a verb. The term *valency* introduced by Tesnière (1959) and developed by Kholodovič (1969, 1974), Apresjan (1974), Lyons (1977), Comrie (1977b) and others has been used in this context. A verb which takes one obligatory participant or argument is said to have a valency of one; a verb which takes two obligatory participants has a valency of two; and a verb which takes three obligatory participants has a valency of three. Owing to the necessity of distinguishing between the different types of participants which can occur with a given verb in a well formed clause (compare for instance give and put), reference is made to the notions of transitivity and subject/object as well. Lyons (1977:486), for instance, states that a transitive verb is a verb that has a valency of two and governs a direct object. What constitutes a direct object again poses a problem.

Although the notion of valency does not overcome any of the problems concerned with defining transitivity and subject/object, it provides a more consistent treatment of some classes of verbs. For instance, in some languages verbs corresponding to believe, trust, help and serve as in Classical Latin (credō, fidō, auxilior, serviō), German (glauben, vertrauen, helfen, dienen) or Polish (wierzyć, ufać, pomagać, służyć) are taken as intransitive for they govern a NP in the dative case and cannot occur in a canonical passive construction. These verbs differ from typical intransitive verbs such as go, stand, laugh, speak, sit, in that they occur with two obligatory participants. The terms *middle* or *semi-transitive* are sometimes used with reference to these verbs. In our opinion it is necessary to have a term for the grouping of trust and believe-type verbs and typical transitive verbs such as hit, cut, throw. A system of verbal classification based exclusively on the transitive/intransitive dichotomy obscures the fact that verbs like trust and believe etc. in Latin, German or Polish display the same property as the corresponding verbs in a language like English i.e. take two obligatory participants.

The notion of valency is also the basis of Dixon's (1979) definition of transitivity. Dixon

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(ibid.) regards transitivity as a linguistic universal at the level of deep structure. He claims that every language distinguishes between verbs which take one obligatory participant - intransitive verbs - and verbs which take two obligatory participants - transitive verbs. Furthermore, each language has a means of identifying these participants. The identification of the participants is made qua a number of universally occurring verbs such as hit, throw, cut, carry etc. All of these verbs involve one participant who could potentially be viewed as the controller or instigator of an event, which Dixon denotes by the symbol A, and another participant which is referred to as O. (We will use the symbol P instead). The only obligatory participant which occurs with intransitive verbs such as go, smile, dance is denoted by the symbol S. Dixon claims that languages tend to extend this identification of participants to all other type of verbs. He argues that although languages may vary in the type of extensions made, the majority of verbs pattern in the way he describes. The idea of liking, for example, may be expressed by a transitive verb, intransitive verb or even an adjectival construction in different languages. Certain verbs like endure in English and in Tagalog may be perceived as transitive although the referent of the A NP cannot be considered to be a controller in the same sense as the A of the verbs: cut, throw, carry etc. Even verbs like hit may be interpreted as intransitive verbs as for example in Turkish (Mulder 1976:299). Dixon (1979 fn. 59) suggests that:

idiosyncratic verbs (like the above) in any language can be dealt with as institutionalised extensions to the universal definition, or they can be dealt with simply as "exceptions" that have to be learnt by heart (exceptions are recognized as a valid category at the levels of phonology and morphology; the idea is also applicable within syntax and even within semantics).

The identification of S, A and P at the level of deep structure is made primarily on semantic grounds. Dixon points out that only A is actually identified in positive terms. S can be semantically either animate or inanimate and need not be perceived as an agent. Similarly, P cannot be equated with a semantic patient. Dixon contends that the identification of S, A and P is strictly reflected



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in the syntax and that each of these relations can be identified through their individual syntactic properties at both intermediate and surface levels.

The problem of transitivity could be considered resolved, if rules were found which clearly identify all three types of constituents. Individual languages possess rules which single out S and A (e.g. relativization in Malayo-Polynesian) or S and P (e.g. antipassivization in ergative languages)<sup>6</sup> or even S, A and P.<sup>7</sup> Rules which are restricted to S and A in all languages have also been suggested (S. Anderson 1976; Dixon 1979; Keenan 1976a). However, although direct objects or Ps can be identified by different syntactic criteria in individual languages, the only syntactic rule which appears to apply regularly to direct objects is the passive. Therefore, in actual fact, all attempts at defining direct objects universally and consequently all universal definitions of transitivity are based on the passive.

Is there thus a mutual dependence between passivization and transitivity or have linguists failed to appreciate what transitivity actually involves? Hopper and Thompson (1980) argue that the latter is the case and that the solution lies in a discourse approach to the problem.

### 1.2.2 Transitivity and Discourse

Hopper and Thompson contend that transitivity is not an all or nothing notion, but rather a matter of degree. According to Hopper and Thompson, clauses can be ranked on a scale of transitivity determined by the following parameters:

- |                  |                                    |
|------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1) Participants  | 6) Affirmation                     |
| 2) Kinesis       | 7) Mode                            |
| 3) Aspect        | 8) Agency                          |
| 4) Punctuality   | 9) Individualization of the object |
| 5) Volitionality | 10) Affectedness of the object     |

For most linguists a canonical transitive clause, as mentioned above, expresses an activity which is "carried over" or "transferred" from an agent to a patient. Hopper and Thompson state that the enumerated parameters of transitivity relate to different facets of the effectiveness or intensity with which this action is transferred from one participant to the other. Thus, a transfer can occur only if two participants are involved (11a), not one (11b) and only if the verb expresses an action (12a),