1. Introduction

In Finnish, passive verbs are marked by the affix -(t)ta-/-(t)tä- followed by -Vn (an extension of the preceding vowel + a final n):

1. a) Diane tappaa etana-n.  
   'Diane will kill the slug.'
   b) Etana tape-taan.  
   'The slug will be killed'

2. a) Satu jo-i shamppanja-n.  
   'Satu drank champagne.'
   b) Shampanja juo-ti-in.  
   'Champagne was drunk / They drank champagne.'

- Shore (1986; 1988), Tommola (1993) and others have argued that Finnish lacks a true passive construction. They relabel the form “indefinite,” “impersonal” or “suppressive”.
- Based on evidence from morphosyntax, case, word order, adverbials, and thematic structure, we argue against these analyses and show that according to standard typological criteria, the Finnish “indefinite”, “impersonal” or “suppressive” is indeed a passive.
- According to typological criteria, the Finnish construction displays not only the main features of impersonal passives cross-linguistically but also several features of personal passives.

II Previous analyses of the Finnish passive

Shore (1986; 1988), Tommola (1993) and Löflund (1998) argue that the Finnish construction diverges from "prototypical passives" (e.g. English) in several key ways:

- **Productivity:** English allows passivisation of transitives only; Finnish allows nearly all verbal categories as input, including intransitives and copulae (we return to this below).
- **Subjects:** English passives require promotion of the underlying DO to syntactic subject position. In Finnish the grammatical subject position can remain empty so that the sentence is introduced by the passive verb (e.g. 3-4) or – the more frequent option – by a locative or temporal adverbial (e.g. 5-6):

- Shore (1986; 1988), Tommola (1993) and others argue that Finnish lacks a true passive construction. They relabel the form “indefinite,” “impersonal” or “suppressive.”
- Based on evidence from morphosyntax, case, word order, adverbials, and thematic structure, we argue against these analyses and show that according to standard typological criteria, the Finnish “indefinite”, “impersonal” or “suppressive” is indeed a passive.
- According to typological criteria, the Finnish construction displays not only the main features of impersonal passives cross-linguistically but also several features of personal passives.

- **Agents:** Shore and Löflund argue that the Finnish passive cannot contain an overt optional Agent phrase (i.e. the equivalent of the English by-phrase):

1. a) Diane tappo-i etanoi-ta.  
   'Diane killed slugs.'
   b) Diane ja Satu tappoi-vat etanoi-ta.  
   'Diane and Satu killed slugs.'

2. a) Puutarha-ssa tape-tti-in etanoi-ta.  
   'In the garden they killed slugs.'
   b) Puutarho-i-ssa tape-tti-in etanoi-ta.  
   'In the gardens they killed slugs.'

3. a) Etana tape-tti-in.  
   'The slug was killed / They killed the slug.'
   b) Etana-t tape-tti-in.  
   'The slugs were killed / They killed the slugs.'

- Shore (1986: 156) argues that locative expressions as in (8) are not syntactic subjects, and doubts that passivised Themes are subjects either (9), since they fail to trigger verbal agreement:

   'In the garden they killed slugs.'
   b) Puutarho-i-ssa tape-tti-in etanoi-ta.  
   'In the gardens they killed slugs.'

5. a) Etana tape-tti-in.  
   'The slug was killed / They killed the slug.'
   b) Etana-t tape-tti-in.  
   'The slugs were killed / They killed the slugs.'
III Arguments in favour of a Finnish passive

Outline of evidence:

1. Passive morphology
2. Licensing and the grammatical subject position
3. Promotion: XPs preceding the passive verb are in subject position (spec,IP)
4. Agreement morphology
5. The interpretation of agentivity
6. The agent phrase
7. Promotion: evidence from case
8. Productivity

Shore (1986: 76): “none of these universal criterial apply for Finnish”

Typological overview (Siewierska 1984):
- Personal vs impersonal passives
- Morphological vs periphrastic passives
- Promotion vs demotion analyses

Key cross-linguistic features of passives:
- special morphological marking
- personal passives: subject agreement, possible agent phrase
- impersonal passives: unspecified human agent; no cross-linguistic constraints on classes of input verbs.

1. Passive morphology

The Finnish passive has a distinct set of morphological markers in past, present, and perfect tenses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Copular</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present perfect</th>
<th>Past perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>olla ‘to be’</td>
<td>ol-la-an</td>
<td>ol-ti-in</td>
<td>on ol-tu</td>
<td>oli ol-tu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intransitive</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present perfect</th>
<th>Past perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>juosta ‘run’</td>
<td>juo-ta-an</td>
<td>juo-ti-in</td>
<td>on juo-tu</td>
<td>oli juo-tu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>istu ‘sit’</td>
<td>istu-ta-an</td>
<td>istu-tti-in</td>
<td>on istu-ttu</td>
<td>oli istu-ttu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitive</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present perfect</th>
<th>Past perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nähda ‘see’</td>
<td>näh-dä-an</td>
<td>näh-ti-in</td>
<td>on näh-ty</td>
<td>oli näh-ty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>murha ‘murder’</td>
<td>murha-ta-an</td>
<td>murha-tti-in</td>
<td>on murha-ttu</td>
<td>oli murha-ttu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

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2. Licensing and the grammatical subject position

We argue that rather than being a “subjectless” construction, in the Finnish passive Spec,IP must be filled by phonetically overt material if V is specified for 3rd person.

12. a) were [VP Spec [VP executed the students]]
   b) The students were [VP t [VP executed t]]

13. a) were [VP executed the students]
   b) The students were [VP executed t]

14. a) Vin serverades till maten (Swedish)
    b) *Serverades vin till maten
    c) Det serverades vin till maten

Although passives can be verb-initial in Finnish, constructions such as (3) and (4) are rare and have only special uses (the specific use – some specific group of people which usually includes the speaker – and the imperative use). They are also almost entirely limited to spoken Finnish:

15. Tape-taan etanoi-ta!
    Kill-pass slugs-part
    ‘Let’s kill slugs!’

We argue, in line Koskinen (1993), that standard Finnish is similar to e.g. Swedish in that it does not allow its grammatical subject position to remain empty:

16. a) Etanoita tapettiin puutarhassa
    Slugs were killed in the garden
    b) Puutarhassa tapettiin etanoita
    in the garden were killed slugs

17. a) Shampanja juottiin juhlissa
    Champagne was drunk at the party
    b) Juhlissa juottiin shampanjaat
    at the party was drunk champagne

Evidence from sitä (see also Holmberg & Nikanne 1994):

18. a) Sitä tapetaan etanoita
    It are killed slugs
    b) Sitä juodaan shampanjaat
    It is drunk champagne
Note that Finnish passives are similar to unaccusatives which also require the Spec,IP position to be filled by phonetically overt material - (19)-(20) show that the Spec,IP must be filled by some other sentence element, such as an adverbial, when the Theme argument remains inside the VP:

19 a)  Laiva **upposi** Itämere-llä
    boat.nom sink-past.3s Baltic sea-on
    'The boat sank in the Baltic sea.'

   b)  Itämere-llä **upposi** laiva
    Baltic sea-on sink-past.3s boat.nom
    'In the Baltic sea sank the boat.'

20. a)  *Upposi laiva Itämerellä (with neutral intonation)
   b)  *Upposi Itämerellä laiva (with neutral intonation)

3. Promotion: Evidence that XPs preceding the passive verb are in subject position (spec,IP)

Most generative accounts of Finnish take the basic structure of Finnish sentences to be some version of the structure proposed in Holmberg et al (1993):

CP - IP - TP - …

21. a)  Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP Diane [IP tappoi etanoita]]]
    Satu said that D. killed slugs

   b)  Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP Diane [IP on tappanut etanoita]]]
       that D. has killed slugs

   c)  Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP Diane [IP ei ole tappanut etanoita]]]
       that D. not has killed slugs

   d)  Satu sanoi, [CP ett+ei [IP Diane [IP t ole tappanut etanoita]]]
       that+t+not D. t has killed slugs

22. a)  Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP puutarhassa [IP tapetaan etanoita]]]
    Satu said that in.the.garden are.killed slugs

   b)  Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP puutarhassa [IP on tapettu etanoita]]]

   c)  Satu sanoi, [CP että [IP puutarhassa [IP ei ole tapettu etanoita]]]

   d)  Satu sanoi, [CP ett+ei [IP puutarhassa [IP t ole tapettu etanoita]]]

Like the pronoun sitä, the initial adverbials in passives can be preceded by only one element which bears contrastive stress or focus; in like with Holmberg & Nikanne (1994), we take this as evidence for a location Spec,IP. Unlike the data in (23), those in (24) are always marked:

23. a)  Diane tappoi etanoita puutarhassa
    Diane killed slugs in.the.garden

   b)  Etanoita tapettiin puutarhassa
       slugs were.killed in.the.garden

4. Agreement morphology

One of Shore’s main arguments against the Finnish passive is the apparent lack of verbal agreement morphology in this construction, in contrast to (personal) passives in Indo-European languages (and see 7-9 above):

25. a)  The woman destroys the houses  The house was destroyed
   b)  The women destroy the houses  The houses were destroyed

26. a)  Etana **tape-tti-in**.
    slug.nom kill-pass-past
    'The slug was killed'

   b)  Etana-t **tape-tti-in**.
    slug-pl kill-pass-past
    'The slugs were killed'

- If the Finnish construction is an impersonal passive, then the lack of a distinction between 1st, 2nd and 3rd person is consistent with cross-linguistic patterns (Siewierska 1984: 99).
- Second, it is not entirely true that Finnish passives lack overt agreement between grammatical subject and finite verb. Old Finnish literature offers numerous examples of passives with overt agreement for 1st, 2nd and 3rd person subjects (the following data from the Bible is from Ojansuu 1909: 103)

27. a)  ...me temmatamme...
    we are.grabbed.1pl

   b)  ...te castetat...
    you  are.baptised.2pl

- Present day Finnish offers many examples of number agreement between nominative plural subjects and finite verbs. These are usually rejected by the grammarians as “hypercorrect” forms (the first two examples from Shore 1986: 31):

28. a)  Säännöt **ovat tehty** rikkomista varten
    rules      be-3pl made-pass to be broken
    'Rules are made to be broken’
b) All the tuxedos were rented.

'All the tuxedos were rented.'

b) Princess Märtha Louise and her husband Ari Behn have been removed from their own wedding photo on the official website of the Norwegian monarchy.

(Ilta-Sanomat, 9 August, 2002)

c) In practice all the F1-positions have already been filled.

'Iltalehti, 30 August, 2002'

These forms are relatively frequent in modern Finnish and may suggest that Finnish is moving toward a personal passive diachronically.

5. The interpretation of agentivity

In the absence of a by-phrase which specifies a human agent, the implicit argument in a passive is interpreted as either [+human, +plural/generic] or [+human, +indefinite]. This is typical of impersonal passives cross-linguistically (Siewierska 1984:96). Finnish is no exception as in Finnish passives, the “instigator” of the action is normally interpreted as [+animate/+human]:

29. a) Pekka tape-tti-in.
    Pekka kill-pass-past
    ‘Pekka was killed (by someone, not something)’

b) Pekka was killed (by someone or something)

Depending on the context, the implicit argument may be interpreted as either human or animal, and either plural or singular, and having varying degrees of specificity.

This is in contrast to other ‘impersonal’ constructions in Finnish including middles and reflexives with -utu, which do not entail an unspecified human agent (data from Shore 1988:159):

30. a) Talo tuho-utu-i (myrsky-ssä).
    house.nom destroy-refl-pass (storm-in)
    ‘The house was destroyed (in a storm)’

31. a) Talo tuhottiin tahalla-an.
    house.destroy-pass-past on.purpose-Px3
    ‘The house was destroyed on purpose.’

b) Manchesteri-ssä ol-laan peloissa-an.
    Manchester-in be-pass in fear-Px3
    ‘In Manchester they are frightened’ (lit. ‘in their fear’)

However, the implied agent can’t bind “normal” arguments:

    shower-iness wash-pass-past hair-Px3
    ‘In the shower it was washed his/her hair.’

6. The agent phrase

Despite Shore’s claims that the Finnish ‘indefinite’ disallows an agent phrase, examples of agentive adjunct phrases with passives are common in Finnish texts. This is a feature of personal passives cross-linguistically:

33. a) Vaasan Asevelikylä rakennettiin rintamamiesten toimesta vuosina 1946-55.
    Vaasa's veteran.village was.built war.veterans' part during 1946-55
    ‘The Vaasa veteran village was built 1946-55 by war veterans.’
    (http://www.edu.vaasa.fi/asaa/rakennettiin.html)

b) Leirini tuhotaan 3714:ssä Azaghalin toimesta.
    my.camp is.destroyed in position 3714 Azaghal's part
    ‘My camp is destroyed in position 3714 by Azaghal.’

All these adjunct phrases identify a [+animate,+human] agent.

7. Promotion: Evidence from case

Many analyses of passives cross-linguistically depend on the notion of “promotion” of an argument to the position or GF of grammatical subject. In these analyses, case is seen as an important criteria for passivisation. In Finnish, non-pronoun DPs undergo the expected case alternation from accusative to nominative:

34. a) Diane tappoi etana-n.
    Diane killed.3s slug-acc
    ‘Diane killed the slug.’
b) Etana tape-tti-in.
   slug.nom kill-pass-past
   'The slug was killed.'

35. a) Pekka murhasi Jussi-n.
   Pekka murdered.3s Jussi-acc
   'Pekka murdered Jussi.'

b) Jussi murha-tti-in.
   Jussi-nom murder-pass-past.
   'Jussi was murdered.'

Counterexamples:

a) Human pronouns remain in accusative case in passives:

36. Hän-e-t murhattiin.
    s/he-acc murder-pass-past.
    'S/he was murdered.'

For an analysis, see Vainikka (1989), Kiparsky (1998), and Nelson (1998); pronouns behave differently with respect to case in a range of syntactic contexts. This may be analysed as a split-ergative system.

Also, some dialects allow for nominative pronouns:

37. Minä / sinä näh-ti-in.
    me.nom / you.nom see-pass-past
    'I / you were seen.'

b) Partitive arguments remain in partitive case:

38. Etano-i-ta tape-tti-in.
    slug-pl-part kill-pass-past
    'Some slugs were killed.'

One explanation for this is that partitive is associated with certain semantic features, including unbounded aspect for VPs and indefiniteness for DPs. Partitive case marking is retained in every sentence type in Finnish, suggesting that this morphology is semantically marked and overrides other structural cases. The same could be said for the partitive of negation.

8. Productivity

Virtually all classes of predicate (copular, intransitive and transitive) may undergo passivisation in Finnish, and this form is extremely frequent in all registers of spoken and written Finnish. This strongly suggests that the passive construction is derived in the syntax (see table 1 above):

Copular verbs (from Iltalehti, front page, 30.8.02)

    at home be-pass now totally happy-pl.part
    'At home everyone is totally happy now.'

Unaccusative verbs

40. a) Kaupungi-ssa kuol-tiin rutto-on, ja maa-lla kuol-tiin nälkä-än.
    city-in die-pass plague-ill and countryside-in die-pass hunger-ill
    'In the city it was died of plague, and in the countryside it was died of hunger.'

b) Asema-lle saavu-ttiin hitaasti.
    station-to arrive-pass slowly
    'Into the station it was arrived slowly.'

Verbs which are disallowed in this construction include verbs denoting natural forces and processes, and certain causative psych predicates:

41. a) *Hämärre-tti-in
    grow dusky-pass-past
    'it was grown dusky'

b) *Sade-tti-in
    rain-pass-past
    'it was rained'

c) *Liplatel-ti-in
    lap-pass-past
    'it was lapped (eg waves)'

d) *Tuul-ti-in
    blow wind-pass-past
    'it was blown (wind)'

e) ??Minu-a / minu-t sure-te-ttii-n.
    I-part / I-acc grieve-caus-pass-past
    '(People) made me sad'

IV Conclusion

Finnish passives don’t resemble English passives, but they do fit into the cross-linguistic category of passives.

Passives in general
✓ Special morphology
✓ Evidence for promotion of XPs to spec(IP) (case, word order)

Impersonal Passives
✓ unspecified human agent
✓ high level of productivity wrt input classes

Personal passives
✓ Some evidence for verbal agreement
✓ Possible agent phrase
Selected references


