

The Finnish Passive is Really a Passive

Satu Manninen & Diane Nelson

Dept. English, Lund
satu.manninen@englund.lu.se

Dept. Linguistics & Phonetics, Leeds
d.c.nelson@leeds.ac.uk

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 kill.3s slug-acc
'Diane will kill the slug.'
- b) Etana **tape-taan**.
slug.nom kill-pass
'The slug will be killed'
2. a) Satu jo-i shamppanja-n.
Satu drink-past.3s champagne-acc
'Satu drank champagne.'
- b) Shamppanja **juo-ti-in**.
champagne.nom drink-pass-past
'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):

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3. Tape-tti-in etanoi-ta.
kill-pass-past slugs-part
'Slugs were killed / They killed slugs.'
4. Juo-ti-in shamppanja-a.
drink-pass-past champagne-part
'Champagne was drunk / They drank champagne.'
5. Puutarha-ssa tape-tti-in etanoi-ta.
garden-iness kill-pass-past slugs-part
'In the garden they killed slugs.'
6. Juhli-ssa juo-ti-in shamppanja-a.
parties-iness drink-pass-past champagne-part
'At parties people drank champagne.'
- **Agreement:** Shore (1988: 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:
 7. a) Diane tappo-i etanoi-ta.
D. kill-past.3s slugs-part
'Diane killed slugs.'
 - b) Diane ja Satu **tappoi-vat** etanoi-ta.
D. and S. kill-past.3p slugs-part
'Diane and Satu killed slugs.'
 8. a) Puutarha-ssa **tape-tti-in** etanoi-ta.
garden-iness kill-pass-past slugs-part
'In the garden they killed slugs.'
 - b) Puutarho-i-ssa **tape-tti-in** etanoi-ta.
gardens-iness kill-pass-past slugs-part
'In the gardens they killed slugs.'
 9. a) Etana **tape-tti-in**.
slug.nom kill-pass-past
'The slug was killed / They killed the slug.'
 - b) Etana-t **tape-tti-in**.
slug-pl kill-pass-past
'The slugs were killed / They killed the slugs.'
- **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):
 10. *Etana tape-tti-in Diane-lla
slug-pl kill-pass-past Diane-by
'The slugs were killed by Diane.'

11. *Shamppanja juo-ti-in Satu-lla
champagne.nom drink-pass-past Satu-by
'Champagne was drunk by Satu.'

In the following sections, we challenge each of Shore et al's main arguments against treating the Finnish construction as a passive. We show that, because many of their arguments are based on criteria for English-type personal passives, they cannot be used to make predictions about a language's ability to have *non*-English type personal passives, or *impersonal* passives.

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:

		<u>Present</u>	<u>Past</u>	<u>Present perfect</u>	<u>Past perfect</u>
<u>Copular</u>	<i>olla</i> 'to be'	ol-la-an	ol-ti-in	on ol-tu	oli ol-tu
<u>Intransitive</u>	<i>juosta</i> 'run' <i>istua</i> 'sit'	juos-ta-an istu-ta-an	juos-ti-in istu-tti-in	on juos-tu on istu-ttu	oli juos-tu oli istu-ttu
<u>Transitive</u>	<i>nähdä</i> 'see' <i>murhata</i> 'murder'	näh-dä-än murha-ta-an	näh-ti-in murha-tti-in	on näh-ty on murha-ttu	oli näh-ty oli murha-ttu

Table 1

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)
wine serve-past-pass with food
'They were served wine with food'
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) Shamppanjaa juotiin juhliassa
champagne was.drunk at.the.party
b) Juhliassa juotiin shamppanjaa
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 shamppanjaa
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 **uppo-si** Itämere-llä
boat.nom sink-past.3s Baltic sea-on
'The boat sank in the Baltic sea.'
- b) Itämere-llä **uppo-si** 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+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

- c) Puutarhassa tapettiin etanoita
in.the.garden were.killed slugs
24. a) Etanoita Diane tappoi puutarhassa
slugs Diane killed in.the.garden
'It was slugs that Diane killed in the garden'
- b) Etanoita puutarhassa tapettiin
slugs in.the.garden killed.pass
'It was slugs that were killed in the garden'
- c) Puutarhassa Diane tappoi etanoita
in.the.garden Diane killed slugs
'It was in the garden that Diane killed slugs'
- d) Puutarhassa etanoita tapettiin
in.the.garden slugs killed.pass
'It was in the garden that slugs were killed'

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.** b) Etana-t **tape-tti-in.**
slug.nom kill-pass-past slug-pl kill-pass-past
'The slug was killed' '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... b) ...te castetat...
we are.grabbed.1pl 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 (→ on tehty)
rules be-3pl made-pass to be broken
'Rules are made to be broken'

- b) Kaikki frakit **olivat vuokrattu.** (→ oli vuokrattu)
all tuxedos be-3pl rented
'All the tuxedos were rented'
- b) Prinsessa Märtha Louise ja aviomiönsä Ari Behn **ovat poistettu.** (→ on poistettu)
Princess M.L. and husband-Px A.B be-3pl remove-pass
omasta hääkuvastaan Norjan kuningashuoneen virallisilla nettisivuilla.
own wedding.picture Norway's royal.house's official webpages
'Princess Märtha Louise and her husband Ari Behn have been removed from their
own wedding photo on the official website of the Norwegian monarchy.'
(*Iltta-Sanomat*, 9 August, 2002)
- c) Ensi kauden F1-tallipaikat **ovat** käytännössä **lyöty** lukkoon. (→ on lyöty)
Next season's F1-positions be-3pl in practice hit-pass lock
'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.

The idea that passive verbs show agreement for 3rd person default and are unspecified for number also receives support from the following facts:

- in present and past perfect tenses, the auxiliary inflects for 3rd person
- in passive negative sentences, the verbal negative element *ei* also appears in the 3rd person form
- in present and past tenses, the *-Vn* affix originates from an old 3rd person affix (Kettunen-Vaala 1956: 80)

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-tti-in.
house.nom destroy-pass-past
'The house was destroyed [by people]'

- b) Talo tuho-utu-i (myrsky-ssä).
house.nom destroy-refl-past (storm-in)
'The house was destroyed (in a storm)'

The following data also suggest that passive sentences contain an agent which can bind a 3rd person possessive suffix (i.e. an implied agent which does not coincide with the grammatical subject):

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:

32. *Suihku-ssa pes-ti-in hiuksia-**an**.
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 3741 Azaghal's part
(<http://www.students.tut.fi/~jolaakso/pbm/p7/p7vuorot25.htm>)
'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. **Häne-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 *Italehti*, front page, 30.8.02)

39. Kotona **ol-iaan** nyt tosi ilois-ia.
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-lla **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'
- c) *Liplatel-ti-in lap-pass-past 'it was lapped (eg waves)'
- b) *Sade-tti-in rain-pass-past 'it was rained'
- 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

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