

Finding your Voice

Hagit Borer

QMUL

Quite commonly, languages, including ones that do not favour periphrasis, nonetheless express verbal passive through periphrastic structures, with an auxiliary or light verb which supports tense, and a lower non-finite form of the verb, frequently a participle, following. An intuitive take on such periphrasis would be that passive voice (P-Vc) defines a domain for phonological realization (possibly a phase) thereby preventing a shared realization between the verbal form and T, and necessitating a light verb or an auxiliary to support the tense features.

The approach runs into conceptual problems when we consider languages such as Hebrew and Arabic, where passive, ostensibly with very similar syntactic properties to those of e.g. English or Italian, nonetheless does (appear to) constitute a single realization domain with T, and where no periphrasis is required. The prima facie conundrum is self-evident. Are we to give up on the claim that the realization domain for P-Vc is syntactically defined (rather than morpho-phonologically), or are we, conversely, to endorse a view according to which the syntax of passive in Hebrew and Arabic is altogether distinct from that attested in, e.g. Italian or Polish? Either way, a closer investigation of synthetic passive constructions is clearly called for, before any conclusion can be safely reached.

Undertaking such an investigation of passive in Hebrew and Standard Arabic, the conclusion I will reach is that contrary to appearance, in both Hebrew and Arabic P-Vc does define a realization domain. However, in spite of superficial morphological similarities, the languages treat the realization of P-Vc differently: in Hebrew the vocalic realization features of the passive verb are determined in the domain dominated by P-Vc, but in Arabic the realization proceeds from P-Vc upwards, excluding properties of lower nodes. In both cases, then, P-Vc acts as a barrier for shared realization, but in a result that is certainly compatible with (some) construals of phase theory, the domain for realization can either be below P-Vc, or above it (potential additional functional heads in the verbal spine are set aside):

1. Realization domains:



This conclusion has a number of important theoretical ramifications which I hope to pursue:

- a. It suggests that locality conditions on realization domains, at the very least within the verbal spine, should not be viewed in terms of sisterhood or similar, but in terms of domains within the spine, each of which may include more than a single functional head (and see in particular Merchant 2015 for conclusions which are compatible with this claim).

- b. It suggests that while vocalic values, within a Semitic morphological system, are syntactically determined, the prosodic interleaving of consonants and vowels, i.e. the auto-segmental aspect of the realization, is purely phonological, and the synthetic forms which emerge as a result may mask the presence of syntactic complexity which includes distinct syntactically defined realization domains.
- c. If on the right track, this conclusion suggests that across the board, P-Vc is syntactically distinct from the frequently postulated syntactic node *voice* (sometimes, but not always, equated with *v*) which is implicated in the licensing of the external argument (or possibly with its absence), and with the former, but not the latter, defining a realization domain. It further emerges that passive predicates are not, in fact, a form of 'unaccusatives'. Finally it suggests that generalizations, presently very common in the literature, which conflate P-Vc with other manifestations of *voice* are on the wrong track, and that to the extent that there is a functional projection which we may call *voice* (and assuming the designation to include more than just the licensing of an external argument), it is distinct from whatever functional structure is involved in the emergence of (canonical) passive.