

## Category in participles: English stative and eventive passives

The category of English passive participles has played a prominent role in several architectural discussions (e.g. Wasow, 1977, and much subsequent work). This paper proposes a new analysis of both stative passive participles (SPP; a.k.a. “adjectival passive”), as in *The metal is flattened*, and eventive passive participles (EvPP; a.k.a. “verbal passive”), as in *The metal was flattened by the smith*. The main argument is that an explanatory account of what these participles share– and the ways in which they differ– requires an *abstract* approach to syntactic category: one in which category features define syntactic distribution, and are interpreted contextually at the interfaces (allomorphy, allosemy). The approach contrasts with analyses in which category labels like “Adjective” directly pair distributional instructions (predicative, attributive) with meaning (e.g. statehood) and form (e.g. *-en* etc.). In the case study at hand, our take on category separates it from the syntax of *argument introduction* in participles, in a way that allows us to explain a hitherto unnoticed interpretive asymmetry in English stative passives.

A satisfactory analysis of English passive participles must explain at least the following (new and familiar) facts: **(E1)** the EvPP and SPP have an identical form and the same syntactic distribution. **(E2)** Semantically, the SPP can have a Target State interpretation (=state resulting from an event) in both attributive and predicative structural positions. **(E3)** EvPP is interpreted eventively in predicative syntax; a novel generalization reported here is that the SPP can have also an event reading, but only in attributive syntax.

(E1) refers to the familiar but important observations that in English, the SPP and EvPP invariably show the same allomorphy (see e.g. Embick, 2003, a.m.o., for apparent counterexamples). In addition, both participles have the same distribution: they occur in predicative position and with the syntax of the copula, and in attributive syntax (and reduced relatives). (E2) connects to the claim that the SPP has two distinct interpretations (Kratzer, 2000): one stative (a kind of caused change-of-state or *Target State* (TS)), and one that is eventive. Concerning the latter (E3), we show that an event interpretation of the SPP is restricted to (prenominal) attributive syntax in English. Old and new tests confirm the asymmetric distribution of the event interpretation. First, event-modifying manner adverbs that are odd with SPPs in predicative position (1a) (in the sense described in McIntyre (2015)) are perfectly acceptable if the SPP is attributive (1b). Second, while eventive verbs/Roots that do not have natural End states are deviant out of context in predicative SPPs (2a), the same SPPs are perfectly acceptable as attributives with an event reading (2b).

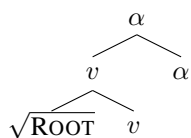
- (1) a. #This tin can is violently/secretly/rapidly flatten-ed.  
b. The violently/secretly/rapidly flatten-ed tin can...
- (2) a. #This tin can is (recently) kicked/examined/poked.  
b. The (recently) kicked/examined/poked tin can...

Further evidence for the predicative/attributive interpretive contrast comes from temporal modifiers, compounding, and *un*-prefixation. These same diagnostics provide evidence that (1b) and (2b) have the syntax of SPPs, and not EvPPs (with SPP vs. EvPP syntax defined below respectively as (3) and (4)). (E3) additionally states the important fact that EvPPs are interpreted eventively in predicative syntax; eventive interpretations are not excluded from this syntactic position more generally. An analysis of participles must therefore explain why the eventive interpretation for just one type of participle is possible in only attributive syntax, but not in predicative syntax.

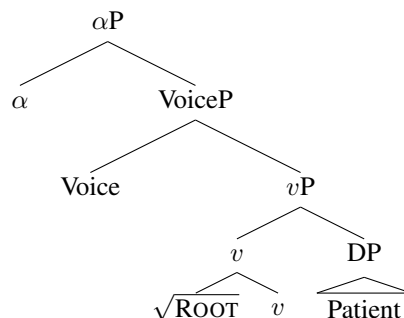
In outline, our analysis takes as a starting point the syntactic analysis of the SPP proposed in Embick (2023), in which the SPP is built *small* as in (3) (cp. Wood, 2023). ‘Small’ for (3) describes the output of directly attaching a head to another, resulting in a head; that is, there is internal complexity without internal phrasal structure. Extending this analysis, the proposal in this paper is that the SPP in (3) contains  $\alpha$ , a categorial label that determines ‘non-verbal’ distribution, i.e. appearance in attributive and predicative syntax (cf. Marantz, 2022; Bešlin, 2023). We propose that the EvPP is also built with  $\alpha$ , as in (4), where it takes a phrasal complement. It follows from this analysis that the two participles contrast in internal syntax rather than category label:  $\alpha$  embeds phrasal structure in the EvPP in (4), but small structure in SPP in (3). (We remain neutral as to whether Voice is present in the SPP in (3).)

We derive an explanation for (E1-3) from two components of the analysis in (3) and (4). First,  $\alpha$  is an abstract morpheme, and so can have contextually-determined interpretations that are distinct at the PF and LF interfaces. The second concerns (internal) argument introduction in phrasal (4) vs. non-phrasal (3) syntax.

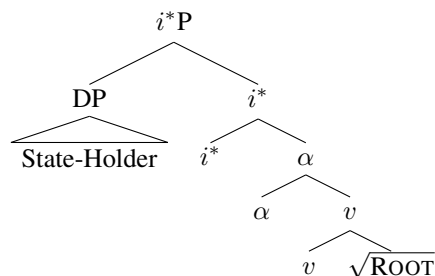
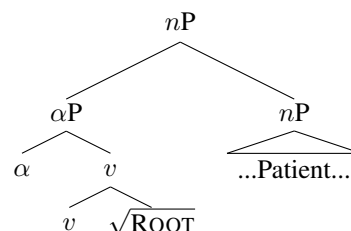
## (3) Small Stative Passive Participle (SPP)



## (4) Eventive Passive Participle (EvPP)



For (E1),  $\alpha$  defines the shared syntactic distribution described above. Concerning form, the SPP and EvPP participles are realized identically because  $\alpha$  is present in both structures and local to the Root, such that (identical) allomorphy is found: *beat-en*, *ben-t*, etc. For meaning, we propose that (E2) and (E3) reflect an interaction between  $\alpha$  and argument introduction. In EvPP,  $\alpha$  embeds phrasal structure and the internal argument is introduced in  $vP$  (4). The small SPP in (3) lacks a syntactic position in which to introduce an argument internal to  $\alpha$  (see Paparounas (2023) and references there). We argue that the State Holder is introduced external to  $\alpha$ , as in (5), by an  $i^*$  head (Wood and Marantz, 2017). A contextual semantic interaction between  $\alpha$  and  $i^*$  – a kind of *allosemy* (cf. Marantz, 2013; Wood, 2015, 2023) – conditions whether  $\alpha$  receives a stative interpretation. In brief, when  $\alpha$  embeds  $i^*$  as in (5), then  $\alpha$  interpreted as a state, giving rise to a stative semantics. When  $i^*$  is absent,  $\alpha$  fails to receive semantic interpretation; which is to say, it is purely syntactic.

(5) Attributive/predicative SPP with  $i^*$ (6) Attributive SPP: Attaching  $\alpha$  to a noun

The SPP in (5) (with  $i^*$ ) can occur both attributively and predicatively. This accounts for the distribution of SPP stative readings (E2). In contrast,  $\alpha$  is not interpreted statively in EvPP (4) (E3). Finally, the possibility of the event reading of prenominal attributive SPPs (i.e., E3) is derivable as an effect of the syntax of attributive modification in English. As illustrated in (6), in attributive syntax the SPP can directly modify an independently introduced argument (i.e. the modified noun). When this happens, the SPP may lack  $i^*$  ( $[[\sqrt{\text{ROOT}} v] \alpha]$ ). In the absence of  $i^*$ , there is no interpretation for  $\alpha$  (see above), and the SPP has the interpretation of the eventive  $[\sqrt{\text{ROOT}} v]$  below  $\alpha$ ; cf. Wood (2023) for a similar proposal in nominalizations with a parallel structure (i.e.  $[[\sqrt{\text{ROOT}} v] n]$ ). The ‘modified’ argument is thus interpreted as the participle’s Patient, as in the corresponding EvPP.

This analysis departs from many theories of category in requiring only indirect links between category labels (here,  $\alpha$ ) and interface properties and argument introduction. We examine this conclusion and further implications, including the small vs. phrasal distinction that distinguishes the SPP from the EvPP.

**Selected References:** Bešlin, M. (2023). Revisiting passive participles: Category status and internal structure. *LI*, 54(4): 729–758. Embick, D. (2003). Locality, listedness, and morphological identity. *Studia linguistica* 57(3):143–169. Embick, D. (2023). Smaller syntax for English stative passives: A first report. *Acta Linguistica Academica* 70(3):285–316. Kratzer, A. (2000). Building statives. *Proceedings of BLS* 26, 385–399. Marantz, A. (2013). Locality domains for contextual allomorphy across the interfaces. In Matushansky, O. et al. (Eds.) *Distributed Morphology today: Morphemes for Morris Halle*, 95–115. MIT Press. Marantz, A. (2022). Rethinking the syntactic role of word formation. In Boneh, N. et al. (Eds.), *Building on Babel’s rubble*, 293–316. PUV. McIntyre, A. (2015). Event modifiers in (German) adjectival participles: Remarks on Gehrke. *NLLT* 33(3):939–953. Paparounas, L. (2023). Voice from syntax to syncretism. PhD thesis, UPenn. Wood, J. (2015). *Icelandic morphosyntax and argument structure*. Springer. Wood, J. (2023). *Icelandic nominalizations and allosemy*. OUP. Wood, J. and Marantz, A. (2017). The interpretation of external arguments. In D’Alessandro, R. et al. (Eds.), *The Verbal Domain*, 255–278. OUP.