
A Functional Analysis of Pseudo-Passives

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A FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS OF PSEUDO-PASSIVES

0. INTRODUCTION

Passives of all types have long held a fascination for grammarians, and the English prepositional passive or pseudo-passive, as it is termed in generative grammar, has been the object of particular attention. A number of these analyses of pseudo-passives (e.g. Poutsma, 1926; Jespersen, 1927, 1937; Bach, 1980) are based upon treatment of the verb + preposition combination as a semantic unit. Others (e.g. Bolinger, 1975, 1977, 1978; Riddle *et al.*, 1977; Sinha, 1978; Davison, 1980) consider the property of being affected to be a significant characteristic of the referents of pseudo-passive subject NPs. The Prague School linguists and others (e.g. Mathesius, 1915, 1975; Dušková, 1971, 1972; Sinha, 1974, 1978; Givón, 1979; Davison, 1980) claim the thematic nature of English subjects to be a crucial consideration in the analysis of passives in general. Finally, Couper-Kuhlen (1979) argues for a treatment of pseudo-passives in terms of restrictions upon configurations of semantic cases of subject and object NPs. However, as we will show below, none of these analyses provides a completely satisfactory account for the full range of possible pseudo-passive sentences.

In this paper we propose a functional analysis which treats passives and pseudo-passives identically.¹ It depends upon Schachter's (1977) concept of role prominence, which is defined as the property associated with the participant(s) that the speaker views as playing the most important role in the situation being described. We argue that all and only NPs referring to role prominent participants occur as passive/pseudo-passive subjects.

The paper will proceed as follows. First we will briefly sketch previous treatments of pseudo-passives and point out their inadequacies. We will then argue for a new, functional analysis. Finally, we will point out some advantages of our analysis beyond its descriptive adequacy.

1. PREVIOUS TREATMENTS

In this section we review the most notable accounts of pseudo-passives, grouped according to their common, major features. First, the most

significant aspects of each treatment within a particular group are presented, and then each group as a whole is discussed.

1.1. *Semantic Unity and Transitivity Analyses*

The notion of a semantic unity or cohesion existing between the verb + preposition or verb + oblique NP has been a persistent theme in the analysis of pseudo-passives. This view has been coupled with claims that the prepositional verb is either equivalent to or actually a syntactically transitive verb. For example, as early as 1807 a grammarian named Angus (cited by van der Gaaf, 1930) wrote that prepositions such as *of* and *for* in *to despair of* and *to pray for* were part of the verb and had a transitivizing effect on it. Poutsma (1926) observes that the verb + preposition is frequently practically equivalent to a transitive verb in either English or a related language. He makes a distinction between phrasal verbs with movable particles (*call her up*), verbs with prepositional objects (*look at*, *impose upon*), and verbs with adverbial adjuncts (*lay on the floor*). The first two types are passivizable, while the third type is not. In the case of a prepositional object, there is a close semantic connection between the preposition and the verb which is lacking between a verb and adverbial adjunct, and the verb + preposition is viewed as the equivalent of a transitive verb taking a direct object.

Similarly, Jespersen (1927) views the NP following the preposition in the active version of a pseudo-passive sentence as the object of a composite verb + preposition expression. Elsewhere (1937), however, he distinguishes particles that are closely semantically linked to the verb, as in *send for* in (1), from those bearing a closer semantic relationship to the following noun phrase, as in *in the bed* in (2):

- (1)(a) Someone sent for the doctor.
- (b) The doctor was sent for.
- (2)(a) Someone slept in the bed.
- (b) The bed was slept in.

Van der Gaaf (1930) states that the prepositional object is actually a direct object, and he compares the prepositional verb in English to the separable compounds of German and Dutch (e.g. *ansehen*, *aanzien*). The fact that the English preposition is always written as a separate word is, in van der Gaaf's view, merely an orthographic convention which does not reflect syntactic structure.

Svartvik (1966) claims that although the range of passivizable prepositional verbs is not well-defined, it includes those verbs and prepositions

exhibiting enough cohesion to function jointly as transitive verbs. These contrast with non-passivizable verbs followed by adjuncts, as described in the discussion of Poutsma above.

According to Svartvik, additional factors influence passivizability of prepositional verbs. Abstract NPs and metaphorical predicates are more amenable to passivization than their concrete and literal counterparts, although context does play a role here. He offers the following sentences as examples (p. 16):

- (3)(a) The conclusion was arrived at.
 (b) *The town was arrived at.

Finally, Svartvik observes that passivization is necessary in some cases to allow placement of the theme at the beginning of the sentence and the rheme at the end, in accordance with the Prague School principle of Functional Sentence Perspective (to be discussed further below).

Quirk *et al.* (1972) claim that there are different degrees of cohesion between verbs and the prepositions following them, and that abstractness contributes to cohesion. Phrasal verbs (*John called up the man*) and prepositional verbs (*John called on the man*) are passivizable and act as single-word transitive verbs. They contrast with single-word verbs followed by a discrete prepositional phrase, as in (4), where the verb and the preposition do not exhibit cohesion and passivization is impossible.

- (4) John called from the office.

Visser (1970–1973) also emphasizes semantic unity and transitivity in his discussion of pseudo-passives, although he claims that it is ultimately lexical considerations and idiomatic usage which determine which verb and oblique NP sequences may passivize. He states that

... in 'to go into a room' and 'to go into a problem' the two *go*'s are semantically quite different: of a stepping forwards there is no question in the latter cluster. 'To sleep in a bed' implies the notion of taking a rest, which is not the case in 'to lie under the bed', so that 'The bed has not been slept in' is acceptable, and the 'The bed has not been slept under' is not. (p. 2121)

According to Visser, the verb and preposition in a sentence like *he sat under a tree* (p. 390) do not exhibit semantic unity, and the oblique NP is considered to be an adverbial prepositional adjunct added to an intransitive verb. In contrast, sentences such as *he longed for rest* (p. 390) contain a verb + preposition cluster which is "equivalent to a transitive verb construed with an object" (p. 390). He claims that this object NP is more appropriately termed "a direct object dependent on a prepositional group-verb" (p. 390) rather than a prepositional object, the traditional label.

Visser believes that only prepositional verbs, and not verbs accompanied by an adverbial prepositional adjunct, can passivize. However, he states that there are sometimes no independent theoretical criteria for deciding what constitutes a prepositional verb, although semantic unity plays an important role. Other relevant factors are the abstractness of the meaning of the predicate and the ability of a verb + preposition to share the same complement with a transitive verb, as in 5 (p. 390):

- (5) “as a fellow-creature she sympathizes with and pities me”.

Visser notes, however, that new pseudo-passives such as the following, (p. 391) where passivizability cannot be attributed to semantic unity between the verb and the preposition are created all the time. He attributes their appearance to analogy and claims that they are idiomatic:

- (6) “the bed had not been lain upon.”
- (7) “there was a singular cold smell about, which, she concluded after a period of interrogation, was the smell of abstinences – the smell of not being smoked in, not being laughed in, not being loved in.”

Chomsky (1965) accepts as a well-established fact that differing degrees of cohesion can be distinguished between a verb and its prepositional phrase, offering the ambiguity of 8 as an example:

- (8) He decided on the boat.

On the reading ‘he chose the boat’, the prepositional phrase is closely linked to the verb, while on the reading ‘he made his decision aboard the boat’, it is a locative adverbial and has no special semantic connection with the verb. Passivization is possible only under the former reading. In Chomsky’s analysis, passivable oblique NPs occur only within the VP in deep structure; non-passivable adverbial obliques are outside the VP.

Johnson (1974) analyzes pseudo-passives in terms of grammatical relations, and indirectly, in terms of constituent structure. As with all of the grammarians discussed above, the primary motivation for his analysis is the purported semantic unity and transitive character of a passivable verb + preposition. Noting the semantic similarity of predicates like *inhabit* and *live in*, he argues that in the case of the latter, the “verb-like” preposition is incorporated into the verb by the rule of Predicate Raising. This promotes the oblique NP following the verb to the status of direct object of a transitive verb and makes it eligible for passivization.

The most recent discussion of pseudo-passives in terms of semantic unity and transitivity is offered by Bach (1980). Within the framework of Montague Grammar, he analyzes Passive as a formation rule defined only for transitive verb phrases, i.e. “a phrase which works syntactically and semantically like a transitive verb”. (p. 299)

Bach offers several types of evidence to show that a phrase such as *persuade to go* as in 9a:

(9a) He persuaded John to go

behaves syntactically like a transitive verb, and that this accounts for its ability to passivize:

(9b) John was persuaded to go.

He assumes that *slept in* in 10 is similarly used as a transitive verb because it passivizes, and states that “many writers have commented that in such examples the combination is felt to be a semantic unit (i.e. a transitive verb)”. (p. 307)

(10) This bed has never been slept in.

Non-passivizable prepositional phrases as in (11) are either “expressions that are governed by certain verbs or just free adverbials”. (p. 307)

(11)(a) John remained under the table.

(b) *The table was remained under by John.

It is clear that there is semantic unity between passive verbs and the following prepositions in cases where the preposition is conventionally linked with the verb and where a single-word synonym can be found. *Decide on* ‘choose’, and *carry out* ‘perform’ are two examples. However, as Visser points out, there are numerous cases of pseudo-passives which cannot plausibly be handled by reference to semantic unity. In such cases, it is unrevealing to appeal to the notion transitivity to account for the pseudo-passives, since the latter notion has not been independently and adequately defined with respect to verb + preposition combinations.

The examples in (12)–(20) below are representative of the range of pseudo-passives which cannot be accounted for in terms of semantic unity. We have collected dozens of such cases from written texts of all sorts and from spontaneous speech, and many more are cited by Visser. The preceding linguistic context is given for each to show that the pseudo-passive does not sound forced or unnatural.²

- (12) “All dress should correspond to the Spirit of the entertainment given. Light-colored silks . . . are fit for carriages at the races, but they are out of place for walking in the streets. They may do for a wedding reception, but they are not fit for a picnic or an excursion. Lawn parties, flower shows, and promenade concerts, should all *be dressed for* in a gay, bright fashion (Sherwood, 1887, pp. 168–169).
- (13) “This theory also explains a constraint on anaphoric processes . . . which involves the impossibility of anaphorization of embedded constituents when variables in the translation of the would-be anaphor are bound by operators outside that translation, i.e. when the translation of the would-be anaphor is being *quantified into*.” (Sag, 1979, p. 161)
- (14) “If you have never had a passport, a birth or baptismal certificate is required. In lieu of this an affidavit by a parent, a brother or sister, or other relative, preferably older than the applicant, and *sworn to* before a notary, will be accepted.” (Franck, 1927, p. 28)
- (15) (Caption for *Dennis . . . the Menace* cartoon. His father is reading the newspaper and his mother is looking extremely bleary-eyed at the breakfast table.)
“Would anybody like to be smiled at?” (Ketcham, 9/28/81)
- (16) “‘My dear Tilly’, her husband had protested at one point, ‘Miss Massinger will think you’re a terrible gossip’.
‘I never gossip, Edwin. I am gossiped *to*. It all comes of looking so fat and comfy and normal. I’m a Mum figure – everyone coughs it up in my lap.’” (Blake, 1959, p. 14)
- (17) (TV reporter explaining why it is difficult to get evidence for a court case concerning an alleged whispering campaign in a Mormon community which caused someone to lose his business.)
“People were afraid of being retaliated against.” (*60 Minutes*, 12/9/79)
- (18) A. (Putting woolen items into a large plastic bag which had some tears in it, with moth balls.) I’ll tape up the holes.
B. Put a piece of paper over the hole and then tape it so the cloth doesn’t get sticky.
A. OK. Even these tiny holes?
B. “Well, anything that won’t get stuck to is OK – that won’t *get*

stuck through." (Spontaneous utterance. B. meant to say *through* at first, misspoke, and then corrected himself.)

- (19) (Discussion about fixing up an old house A and B had just moved into. The conversation was taking place in the study.)
- A. First we've got to paint the bathroom, and then the yellow room before your parents come for Thanksgiving.
- B. You know, we don't have to paint that room.
- A. Well, I suppose WE could use it like it is.
- B. We don't have to use that room at all. We can use this room as our guest room. All we have to do is move the table to the side.
- A. (Going back to an idea discussed the day before to put the guests downstairs where it would be warmer than the upstairs guest room.) "I thought WE were going to stay up here."
- B. "Whatever. Whether they stay up here or we do, this room can be *slept in.*"

The following are some forceful examples collected from literature by Visser (he does not give contexts):

- (20) "She sat pale and erect in her corner, brushed against by silks and satins, chattered across by this person and that." (p. 2130)
- (21) "'The carriage is not to be sat in in the usual way', she said." (p. 391)
- (22) "At that time ladies were not quite so easily run away with as Columbine." (p. 391)
- (23) "the cheap breeches . . . skintight as if both they and their wearers had recently and hopelessly been rained on." (p. 392)
- (24) "Altogether it was the kind of bed to be slept on rather than lingered in." (p. 392)

None of the semantic unity/transitivity analyses can handle the above examples. Indeed, the range and variety of such examples leads Visser to conclude that "here, especially, analogy is stronger than theory, and theory has constantly to be reformulated". (p. 2131)³

As noted above, Bach's analysis appeals to the notion of semantic unity, and it is therefore weakened by the counterexamples given above. However, since he also offers considerable syntactic evidence for his analysis of all passives in terms of transitivity, it is appropriate to consider that here separately.

Bach does not specifically discuss pseudo-passives with respect to his syntactic evidence. His argument with respect to pseudo-passives, at least implicitly, takes the following form: there is syntactic evidence for a significant category of transitive verb phrase; ordinary single-verb passives with all their peculiarities can be handled by defining Passive for transitive verb phrases; verb + preposition combinations like *sleep in* (*This bed has never been slept in*) can be passivized; therefore, *sleep in* must be a transitive verb phrase for it to be handled by the same Passive rule. At this point he appeals to the semantic unity hypothesis for independent support.

Two of Bach's syntactic arguments supporting his analysis of passives in terms of transitivity can be applied to pseudo-passives as well. (The other two appear to be irrelevant, as analogous examples with pseudo-passives cannot be constructed.) The first concerns syntactic coherency. The thrust of this argument is that it is possible to move⁴ a constituent that is an object of a transitive verb phrase, as with Heavy NP Shift in (25a) and Wh-Question formation in (26a), but not a constituent that is part of a transitive verb phrase, as with Pseudo-Cleft in (27a). These contrast with the non-transitives in the (b) versions (p. 303):

- (25)(a) I persuaded to leave the house all the little boys in the basement.
 (b) ?I promised to leave the house all the little boys in the basement.
- (26)(a) Who did you persuade to do the dishes.
 (b) ?Who did you promise to do the dishes.
- (27)(a) ?What I persuaded John was to do the dishes.
 (b) What I promised John was to do the dishes.

The Heavy NP shift evidence fails for pseudo-passives. It should be the case that the object NP can shift, with the purported transitive verb phrase *sleep in* remaining intact. However, as (28a) shows, this results in an unacceptable sentence. (28b) where the verb + preposition combination is broken up by an adverbial phrase is actually better:

- (28)(a) *John slept in for the first time last night an antique bed with a rope spring and straw mattress that he bought at an auction. Man, was his back aching this morning!⁵
 (b) John slept for the first time last night in an antique bed with a rope spring and straw mattress

Wh-Question Formation also fails to show a distinction between passivizable verb + preposition constructions and verbs followed by a free adverbial, which according to Bach are not transitive verb phrases and do not passivize. Compare (29) and (30):

- (29) What did you decide on? (the blue dress or the red?)
- (30) What did you come in? (the VW or the convertible?)

To summarize, it does not appear to be the case that all and only passivizable verb + preposition sequences act as coherent syntactic units.

The second of Bach's syntactic arguments relevant to pseudo-passives concerns the conjunction of phrases such as *persuade to go* with ordinary transitive verbs such as *visit*. If the former can be conjoined with the latter, then there is evidence for its analysis as a transitive verb phrase, since it is generally assumed that only members of the same category can be conjoined. Bach offers the following example (p. 303), noting that his use of the indefinite NP *a man* precludes Right Node Raising as a source for this sentence:

- (31) I visited and persuaded to vote for me a man that I met in the grocery store.

However, consider (32), which is a fully parallel sentence:

- (32) The old tramp alternately slept in and hid under a gigantic old oak bed in the attic.

Slept in must be a transitive verb phrase for Bach since it passivizes, as shown in his example (11) above. *Hid under*, on the other hand, is analogous to his example *remained under* (see (12)), which he claims is not transitive and consists of a verb with a free adverbial denoting a location. Yet *slept in* and *hid under* may be conjoined.⁶ Thus, the conjunction argument also fails to distinguish passivizable verb + preposition combinations from non-passivizable verb + adverbial sequences.

1.2. An 'Affectedness' Analysis

Bolinger's analysis of pseudo-passives (1975, 1977, 1978) also makes use of the notion of transitivity, but it involves a different definition of the notion. For Bolinger, a transitive relationship between a verb and an object (not necessarily a direct object) exists when that object denotes a genuinely affected patient. (See also Sinha, 1978, and Davison, 1980, to be discussed below, for additional references to the affectedness of the passive subject NP.) It contrasts with a purely spatial (including temporal) or existential relationship, which he refers to as spatiality. Only NPs denoting "true patients", i.e. those actually affected in some way by the action described by the verb, may be passivized. These passivizable NPs may be any type of object – direct, indirect or oblique. For example, in (33) (1977, p. 68), the

NP *me* represents a “terminus” rather than an affected patient, and the passive sentence is therefore odd:

- (33)(a) The train approached me.
 (b) *I was approached by the train.

In (34), on the other hand, the referent of *I* and *me* may be viewed as affected in some way by the stranger’s act (Bolinger suggests that perhaps the stranger was a panhandler), and the passive sentence is acceptable.

- (34)(a) The stranger approached me.
 (b) I was approached by the stranger.

According to Bolinger, when an object of a preposition represents a true patient and not merely some entity located with respect to some other entity, “or to existence itself, i.e. presence on the scene or absence” (1977, p. 68), then that object NP may be passivized under the same conditions as those for direct object passivization. He gives examples such as the following (1977, p. 68):

- (35)(a) My brother has lived in Chicago.
 (b) *Chicago has been lived in by my brother.

- (36)(a) Several famous personages have lived in the house.
 (b) The house has been lived in by several famous personages.

In (35), *Chicago* merely denotes a location and the city has not been affected by the fact that a certain person has lived there. Bolinger states that the house referred to in (36), on the other hand, “has an aura by virtue of the people who have lived in it”. (1977, p. 68)

Bolinger also discusses ditransitives, which contrary to popular opinion, may be passivized, and proposes an interpretability condition on them. Thus sentence (37):

- (37) *I don’t like to be blamed mistakes on.

is unacceptable “because of the high degree of expectation that *blame* will have a personal and not an abstract object: the hearer gets as far as *blamed* and is sure that *I don’t like to be blamed* means what it appears to mean – and then *mistakes on* forces him to revise” (1977, p. 59). On the other hand, sentences such as (38) lack distracting elements which could prevent the listener/hearer from interpreting the verb + preposition as a unit (1977, p. 59):

- (38) To be whispered such dirty innuendoes about was enough to break any girl’s heart.

Bolinger gives five factors which contribute to interpretability of ditransitives:

(1) the contextual parallelism of a normal and a ditransitive passive, as in (39):

(39) He has been burned, stuck pins in, beheaded – all in effigy, of course. (p. 59)

(2) analogy with another acceptable passive, as in (40):

(40)(a) John was done a favor for.

(b) John was done a favor. (p. 60)

(3) the use of an empty verb whose following noun phrase is expected to complete its meaning, as in (41):

(41) That product can't be made a profit from. (p. 61)

(4) the predictability of the verb + noun combination, as in (42):

(42) The troops were opened fire on. (p. 61)

(5) use of the same or a closely related verb + noun expression in the passive as in a previously uttered active, as in (43), or an indication that something is presupposed from a previous context, as in (44):

(43) 'He paid too much for his coat.'

– 'Well, lots of things are paid too much for nowadays. You have to expect it.' (p. 62)

(44) How does it feel to be aimed a gun at? (p. 63)

It is not our intention to do an exhaustive review of Bolinger's very interesting and thorough work on pseudo-passives. We agree in many of the details, and accept as relevant and intuitively appealing, as Householder (1978) puts it, his factors for predicting passivizability. In fact, we independently arrived at similar conclusions about affectedness in Riddle *et al.* (1977). However, as useful as the notion of "genuinely affected patient" may be for the analysis of many pseudo-passives, it does not account for the entire range of examples we have collected. In addition, we believe that Bolinger's factors contributing to interpretability are better described as relating to the property of role prominence. We will take up the latter point in Section 2 below.

There are two problems with Bolinger's analysis in terms of affected patients. First, as Householder points out, he does not offer a satisfactory definition of *affected*. It is clear that Bolinger intends the concept of

affectedness to include all sorts of physical, psychological and metaphorical effects. Thus, in his reply to Householder (Bolinger, 1978), he states that in the latter's purported counterexample to the affectedness thesis,

(45) The Pacific was first seen by Balboa.

"Balboa is a figure of some weight" and that in the relevant historical context, the first sighting of the Pacific constitutes a discovery. These facts cause the Pacific to be viewed in an anthropocentric way as affected. We believe that such a view of affectedness extends the meaning of the word to an unacceptable extreme, thereby robbing it of intuitive appeal. At this point the definition of affectedness seems so close to meaning "psychologically prominent", that little is gained by insistence upon the former term.

Moreover, there are cases where the notion of affectedness does not appear to be relevant in even a figurative sense. In examples such as those in (46)–(49), it is very difficult to view the referents of the subjects as being affected in any way. This is especially true in negative sentences or clauses such as (46)–(48). In fact, they could equally well be viewed as *affecting* rather than *affected*, by virtue of the properties assigned to them by the predicate.

(46) "A ledge of rock which cannot be got at." (Visser, p. 2130)

(47) "Such a dress can't be sat down in." (Joos, 1964, p. 94)

(48) And my brother simply cannot be disagreed with.

(49) "There the mistakes were, in their houses, pervading their lives, having to be sat with at every meal and slept with every night." (Visser, p. 2132)

We will argue in Section 2 that role prominence is the crucial factor in passivization in general. The property of affectedness merely contributes to this prominence.

1.3. A Case Analysis

Couper-Kuhlen (1979) proposes a detailed case analysis of pseudo-passives based on an examination of some 1800 sentences in isolation. She argues that the semantics of both the active subject and the active object (including direct, indirect and oblique objects) must be considered, and that it is primarily the presence of certain cases in particular configurations which determines which structures are basically eligible for pseudo-passivization. For example, if the active subject is agentive and the active object is a

patient, the sentence is basically passivizable (i.e. there is at least one acceptable example of this type). However, an object NP which is a patient may not passivize if the active subject is an instrument or a location. Other examples of non-passivizable active subject-object configurations are agentive-manner, agentive-reason, and agentive-direction.

In addition to case relations, Couper-Kuhlen notes that lexical factors are also relevant, since two essentially synonymous phrases might not passivize equally well, but that this is a secondary factor. Finally, she remarks on the importance of contextualization, which includes the choice of tense, modality and aspect, and the information focus. She claims that the *by*-phrase of a passive may contain new, but never given information. Of course, the *by*-phrase may be omitted, and in this case, according to Couper-Kuhlen, the entire sentence offers new information.

Couper-Kuhlen concludes that it is the interaction of at least the three factors mentioned above – i.e. the configuration of the case relations of the active subject and object, the occurrence of certain lexical items, and contextualization – which ultimately determines the acceptability of a pseudo-passive sentence. Despite her belief in the role contextualization must play in accounting for the varying degrees of acceptability of pseudo-passive sentences, she feels that the case relations of the active subject and object are of primary relevance, and she states that the study of contextualization is beyond the scope of her book.

Couper-Kuhlen's insights into the nature of pseudo-passive sentences are impressive, but we believe that her study of sentences in isolation has caused her to underestimate the role of contextual constraints. She states that her semantic constraints must be relaxed in certain contexts, failing to consider the possibility that contextual constraints are primary and that semantic properties merely contribute to the occurrence of a certain contextual property. Another drawback to her analysis is that although she suspects that the same semantic conditions she posits for pseudo-passives hold for normal passives as well, she does not investigate the latter in terms of case relations and makes no claim regarding them.

1.4. *Thematic Analyses*

An important approach to the study of passives in general has been the theme–rheme analysis of the Prague School. Mathesius (1975) (see also Mathesius, 1915) claims that most sentences are composed of two parts, the theme and the rheme. The communicative intent of the speaker determines this configuration, known as the Functional Sentence Perspective.

Mathesius defines the theme as “the element about which something is stated” (p. 81) and identifies it with given information. The rheme is that

which is stated about the theme, and corresponds to new information. In English, the theme is usually the subject of the sentence. Passivization⁷ is a means of making a non-agent theme a subject. Sometimes, however, where the active subject is indefinite or refers to an unknown entity, or represents superfluous information, a passive may occur with a non-thematic subject, as in 50 (p. 113):

- (50) It will be remembered that several weeks ago we quoted a very important passage from a speech by Mr. Attlee here.

Mathesius views the two tendencies described above to be in conflict.

There has been a great deal of discussion among Prague School linguists about Mathesius' definition of theme. Trávníček (cited by Firbas, 1966a) criticizes it on the grounds that, among others, not all themes convey known information, and he defines theme as the first element of a sentence. Firbas shows that such a conception of theme is inadequate and defines the theme as the element of a sentence associated with the lowest degree of communicative dynamism (CD). The latter term refers to the degree to which the element in question advances the communication. Firbas states that elements conveying new information exhibit higher degrees of CD than those conveying known information, but that even within a sentence conveying only new information, different degrees of CD are exhibited by its elements. The latter observation is important because it is possible for a theme to convey new information and still have a lower degree of CD than the rheme.

Firbas (1966b) shows that even in a passive the subject may be rhematic rather than thematic. For example, he claims that in the example below,

- (51) "From time to time, by dint of infinite patience, I managed to reach a stand. *New Zealand apples* were being sold, or *rice-brooms* from Australia were exhibited, or a *billiard-table* manufactured in the Bermudas." (p. 244)

the italicized passive subjects are part of the rheme. He states that this does not contradict Mathesius' claim that the passive voice is used to arrange a sentence into a theme–rheme sequence, but rather emphasizes that it does so only when other factors cooperate. In the above case, this "cooperation of means" includes the occurrence of the nongeneric indefinite article (which he takes to include a zero article for plurals), a verb of "appearance or existence on the scene", and the temporal setting (p. 245).

Unlike Mathesius, Dušková (1971) distinguishes topic from theme. The theme is "an element known from the preceding context and consequently

carrying no new information” (p. 128). A topic NP, on the other hand, may carry new information. According to Dušková, passivization allows the theme to become the subject and to thus occur in its normal, initial position. In addition, passivization causes the rhematic element containing new information, i.e. the verb, to be placed in final position, which is the unmarked position for rhemes. Another relevant factor is that passivization eliminates the presence of an intrusive active subject where an impersonal effect is desired, especially in scientific writing. In such cases the passive subject may introduce new information and therefore be a topic rather than a theme. For example, sentence (52) is of the form topic – event relating to it, and the passive subject actually introduces the largest amount of new information, therefore also possessing the highest amount of communicative dynamism:

- (52) “In the six years 1956–61, a total of 81,079 applications for disablement benefit were made by coalminers.”

Sinha (1974) follows the Prague School linguists in analyzing passives in terms of theme. His analysis is similar to Dušková’s in that he considers Passive to be conditioned by the need to make a thematic non-subject NP into a subject, but he does not distinguish theme from topic. A later paper by Sinha (1978) analyzes passives as universally involving foregrounding of an affected NP and “backgrounding” of a cause or agent NP, which may or may not show up on the surface. Givón (1979) also discusses passivization as “promotion [of an NP] to higher topicality” (p. 204), resulting in loss of subjecthood for the less topical agent NP.

It seems clear that the notion of theme is relevant for the analysis of passives. However, as both Firbas and Dušková note, not all passives have thematic subjects. An additional problem concerns the definition of theme itself. Chafe (1975) notes that Firbas appears to equate degree of communicative dynamism with degree of newness – i.e., an element with high communicative dynamism contributes more new information than others. He questions whether the given/new distinction is scalar, claiming that the examples offered in support of this have not been convincing. Prince (1979) also discusses a number of complexities involved in defining given versus new information.

As for Sinha (1978), we have already shown that not all passive subjects can be labelled “affected”.

As we will show in this paper, a characterization of passives in terms of role prominence has greater generality and avoids the difficulty of providing an adequate linguistic definition of theme and/or topic.

1.5. A *Conversational Implicature Analysis*

Davison's (1980) interesting analysis of pseudo-passives in terms of conversational implicature in effect combines aspects of the affectedness, theme (topic) and case approaches. She claims that "'extra' attitudinal and modal meanings" (p. 42) are often associated with passives, and particularly with "peculiar" passives such as the English pseudo-passive and adversative passives of other languages. Like Bolinger and others, she also observes that there is often an implication of a physical or psychological effect on the referent of the pseudo-passive subject NP. Another implication concerns possibility. According to Davison, (53) entails both (54) and (55) (p. 54), but conversationally implicates (54), i.e. "that the new subject has some quality resulting from the event described", and that conveying this information is the reason for uttering that particular sentence (p. 55):

- (53) That bridge has been flown under by Smilin' Jack.
 (54) This bridge can be flown under by Smilin' Jack. (predicates possibility of the entire proposition.)
 (55) It is possible for Smilin' Jack to fly under this bridge. (predicates ability of Smilin' Jack.)

The basis of Davison's conversational implicature analysis is as follows. She claims that passives are marked constructions and that uttering a passive instead of the usual active constitutes a violation of Grice's *Maxim of Manner*. In addition, the promotion of an oblique NP to subject position (and therefore topic position, she assumes) is marked, and is therefore a violation of the *maxim of Relevance (Relation)*, since an NP not normally taken to represent a topic is made to do so. These violations give rise to an implicature that there is some particular communicative reason for the use of such a marked construction, and further, to an implicature involving affectedness or possibility as described above.

Davison proposes that "the basic factor which determines the well-formedness of the promotion of a given NP by Passive (actually, felicity . . .) is its grammatical role in underlying structure, as a term or constituent of an adverbial of a particular type" (p. 49).⁸ She formulates the following hierarchy of passivizability:

- (58)
- | | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Direct
Object | (Indirect
Object) | { Locative
Instrumental } | { Time
Accompaniment } | { Cause
Purpose
Manner } | ∅ |
|------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|

NPs become increasingly marked for passivization the further to the right they occur on the hierarchy. When more than one non-subject NP

occurs, the leftmost is the most accessible to passivization, if other lexical and pragmatic conditions are fulfilled.⁹ Davison also notes that NPs referring to abstract concepts are generally less accessible to passivization than those referring to specific concrete entities.

There are several difficulties with Davison's analysis. One basic problem concerns her use of the notion "markedness". She claims to be using the term in its Prague School sense, but this is actually not the case.¹⁰ For the Prague School linguists, markedness involves an opposition between a pair of elements, one possessing a particular characteristic (the marked member) and the other not (the unmarked member) (see Jakobson, 1971, especially pp. 3 and 136–137; Trubetzkoy, 1969; and Vachek, 1966). For example, Jakobson considers the preterit in English to be marked with respect to the present, and the plural to be marked with respect to the singular. He does describe the passive as marked (p. 490), but his remarks in this article about meaning and function make it clear that the passive is not considered unusual, non-normal or deviant in any sense. It should be noted that although non- or less normal or deviant elements are considered to be marked, it is not the case that all marked elements are considered less normal than their unmarked counterparts.

It ought to follow from Davison's treatment of markedness, then, that the use of a plural rather than a singular conveys some sort of conversational implicature. Of course, such a conclusion is undesirable and would not be within the spirit of Davison's approach. But that is just the point. Instead of making use of the Praguean notion of markedness, her analysis actually relies on an understanding of markedness as representing deviance from some norm. The norm here is the active form, which Davison describes as "sufficient to convey a proposition involving an agent and a direct object" (p. 51). This view of markedness as deviance is implicit in her Gricean analysis, since the derivation of a conversational implicature depends on a deliberate flouting of a maxim (see Grice, 1975). In fact, such a state of affairs appears to be diametrically opposed to what Praguean functional grammarians would hold. It seems reasonable to say that they subscribe to the view (as do we) that each syntactic construction, including the passive, has a particular conventional function to perform and is used for that purpose. Using a construction in its conventional function ought not to be viewed as a violation of a principle of conversation.

It should follow from Davison's analysis that the use of topicalized NP sentences such as (57):

(57) Fries, I don't eat. They're too greasy.

gives rise to a conversational implicature as well. Yet it seems highly

undesirable to conclude that the contrastive force (see Chafe, 1975) of such sentences is due to violations of Manner and Relevance. How would the fact be represented that such sentences always have a contrastive force, but passive sentences involving violations of the same maxims do not? One might just as well argue that the use of “contrastive” stress results in conversational implicature as well.¹¹ Such a view essentially denies that linguistic devices are conventionally associated with particular linguistic functions.

There are other objections to Davison’s analysis as well. Some of them concern her appeal to the cancellability criterion. Davison offers examples such as (58) (p. 55) to show that the implicature that the bed is somehow interesting can be cancelled without contradiction:

- (58) This bed may have been slept in by George Washington, but I’m not at all impressed.

The most serious problem is that if, as she argues, the rhetorical point of such a passive sentence is to convey some extra meaning, then it does not make sense for a speaker to choose that particular construction only to disclaim the implication which is otherwise claimed to be its rhetorical point.

Second, the cancellation phrase would have the same effect of not producing a contradictory sentence if no conversational implicature were involved. The point of the cancellability criterion is to distinguish conversational from conventional implicatures, e.g. entailments (see Sadock, 1978). It does not, however, ensure that some implication is a conversational implicature as opposed to any conclusion arrived at by logical thinking. It does not seem reasonable to assume that all instances of inductive reasoning in a speech situation result in conversational implicature. For example, consider the following dialogue:

- (59) *Anne:* Want some more meat?
Bob: No, thanks.
Anne: Not hungry, huh?
Bob: No. I had a big lunch.

Speaker A concludes from B’s answer “No, thanks” that he is not hungry. No one would call this a case of conversational implicature. Now consider (60):

- (60) *Anne:* Would you like another roll?
Bob: No, thanks. I’m still hungry, but unfortunately, I’m on a diet.

Bob assumes that Anne would ordinarily conclude from his answer ‘No, thanks’ that he is full. He prevents this interpretation by giving a different reason for his refusal. Thus, the statement that he is on a diet could be said to cancel the impression of lack of hunger that his ‘No, thanks’ might have given. This does not indicate that the speaker’s being full is ordinarily a conversational implicature of ‘No, thanks’ when used in such contexts. It is merely one of several plausible reasons the listener might think of to explain the refusal.¹²

Since there seems to be no strong support for the presence of conversational implicature in pseudo-passives, we suggest that Davison’s implicatures should be viewed as reasons for why a speaker would view the referent of a particular NP as role prominent in some situation, and therefore as eligible for representation by a passive subject NP.

We will close this section with a few words about the hierarchy of passivizability, which predicts degrees of markedness. The hierarchy represents only tendencies, and Davison notes that NPs further to the right are also likely to be subject to constraints on definiteness and concreteness. Thus, it ought to be doubly preferable for a locative NP referring to a concrete entity to be passivized than an abstract time NP whose position on the hierarchy is to the right of locatives. As the examples below show, however, this is not always the case.

- (61) Winter is slept through in Northern Europe by many members of the animal kingdom.
- (62) *Northern Europe is slept in through the winter by many members of the animal kingdom.

To conclude, the fact that the hierarchy only represents general tendencies and is not completely predictive for any one sentence lessens its value as an analytical tool.

2. A NEW FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

We will argue below for a new functional analysis of pseudo-passives based on Schachter’s (1977) concept of role prominence.

Schachter (1977) argues that Topic NPs and the traditionally termed Actor NPs (he says that the name ‘Protagonist NPs’ would be more apt for the latter) in Philippine languages divide between them syntactic properties associated with subject NPs in languages which make crucial reference to subjecthood. Conversely, subject NPs have two semantic characteristics which are divided between Topic NPs and Protagonist NPs in Philippine languages. These are referential prominence and role prominence respec-

tively. It is the notion of role prominence which is relevant for our analysis of pseudo-passives.¹³

The Protagonist NP, which is the NP whose referent is viewed by the speaker as “being at the center of events” (p. 282) has role prominence. Schachter suggests that “it is THE major function of [the passive] construction to assign role prominence to the patient at the expense of the agent” (p. 300). We carry his suggestion a step further by arguing that role prominence is the single, crucial condition on the occurrence of any NP as a passive subject, whether it be a patient, location, instrument, or bear any other type of semantic role. In other words, we claim that all and only NPs whose referent the speaker views as being role prominent in the situation described by the passive clause occur as subjects of passive verbs.

The discussion will concentrate on the most difficult examples for any analysis of passives, i.e. pseudo-passives, since Schachter has already argued for a role prominence analysis of regular passives. As the variety of examples shows, our analysis handles all types of pseudo-passives, whether they involve separable phrasal verbs such as *call up* (‘telephone’), conventionalized verb + preposition combinations such as *vouch for*, verbs followed by prepositions not semantically linked to them as *walk on* in *walk on the rug*, and even verb + preposition + preposition combinations as *put up with*. The majority of the examples have been drawn from actual texts or are cases of spontaneous speech recorded by us. In order to show that role prominence is involved, it is necessary to examine the linguistic and situational contexts in some detail.

In the passages in (63)–(65) below, the referent of the passive subject, a human being, is role prominent. Each passive subject NP discussed represents a different semantic case.

- (63) “When my ablutions were completed, I was put into clean linen of the stiffest character, like a young penitent into sackcloth, and *was trussed up* in my tightest and fearfulest suit.” (Dickens, 1861, p. 61)
- (64) “Why did you run away?”
 “Why did you force me to?”
 “Well it hasn’t been much good, has it, seeing here we are again.”
 “It hasn’t been the least good.”
 “It never is, unless it’s done in twos. Then I’m all for it. Don’t forget that the next time, will you. And you might also give the poor devil who *is run from* a thought. He has the thinnest time.” (Russell, 1925, p. 150)

- (65) “But he became interested in the law, visiting courtrooms occasionally. Pressed to explain, he told this reporter:

‘Oh, I don’t know. I worked among the very, very poor, the migrant laborers, the Chicanos and the I.W.W.’s who I saw *being shot at* by the police. I saw cruelty and hardness, and my impulse was to be a force in other developments in the law.’” (Whitman, 1980)

The narrator in (63) is Pip, a young boy raised in a rather heartless manner by his older sister. She treats him more like an annoying object to be got out of the way and always at fault, than as a human being with feelings. He tells his story from the point of view of a bullied, helpless child who is always being done things to, but never allowed to do anything himself. Thus Pip plays the most prominent role in the passage. Our attention is focused upon him in terms of what he is experiencing rather than on the person who is doing something to him. Note that when the passage is converted into the active voice, as in (66), so that Pip is no longer the referent of the subject, his role as experiencer of the mistreatment is defocused and attention is drawn to the sister as perpetrator.

- (66) When she had completed my ablutions, my sister put me into clean linen of the stiffest character, like a young penitent into sackcloth, and she trussed me up in my tightest and fearfullest suit.

Example (64) is set in a context where a woman has temporarily fled from her suitor. The narrator describes the situation from the point of view of the injured party, the young man. The running away is described in terms of its effect on him. Thus, the pseudo-passive is appropriate here because it allows the NP referring to the person playing the central role to be the subject.

(65) is from a newspaper account of an interview with William O. Douglas about his career. The general topic of conversation of the section of the article from which (65) was taken was how Douglas changed the direction of his legal career. That the I.W.W.’s are more role prominent in Douglas’ eyes in the situation described than the agents of the shooting, the police, is clear: it was his work among them and other groups that influenced his career decision. This role prominence conditions the occurrence of the NP *the I. W. W.’s* as a pseudo-passive subject.

Notice that when the same passive verb + particle/preposition combinations used in (63)–(65) are used in contexts where the referents of their subjects are not role prominent with respect to the other participants

described in the clause, the sentences are much less acceptable. There is a role conflict between the situationally prominent NP and the linguistically prominent NP in each of these sentences:

- (67) *Judge*: Tell the court what you did on the night in question, Mr. Lynch.
Lynch: Well, even though we were out in the woods, we didn't dare let Mr. Spinella leave because he might have been able to find his way to the main road and then hitch a ride from there to phone the police. ??So we hit him over the head and then he *was trussed up* with ropes so he couldn't get away when he came to.
- (68) *John*: What are you doing?
Jane: We're having a race from that tree to the bridge.
John: ??I think it's better for this tree *to be run from*. Then you won't have those big rocks in your way.
- (69) Hey, I just heard something that sounded like a gun! I think those guys are horsing around with the guns again. ??It sounded like the milk cans *were being shot at*. I wish they'd learn that shooting guns is serious business.

(70) is another example of a passive with a role prominent animate NP:

- (70) "... I presume that Winnie's trunk had been unpacked on arrival?"
 Miss Pope looked a little put out of countenance.
 'Routine', she said, 'We live strictly by routine. The girls are *unpacked for* on arrival and their things put away in the way I expect them to be kept.'" (Christie, 1972, p. 189)

The first speaker's (Poirot) concern is what happened to a particular trunk. But the emphasis shifts when Miss Pope speaks because she feels she must answer to an implied criticism, however slight, about the smooth functioning and discipline of her boarding school. Her utterance is made from the point of view of how her students' lives are strictly regulated. For this reason, the girls referred to in the passive sentence are role prominent with respect to the trunks or to the people who unpack them. If *the trunks* is the passive subject, as in (71), however, a conflict in prominence occurs between the trunks, referred to by the subject NP of the first conjunct, and the girls, indirectly referred to by the possessive *their* in the subject NP of the second conjunct:

- (71) . . . “Routine”, she said. “We live strictly by routine. The trunks are unpacked for the girls on arrival and their things put away in the way I expect them to be kept.”

In the active version (72), it is the dormitory supervisors who are presented as role prominent:

- (72) “Routine”, she said. “We live strictly by routine. The dormitory supervisors unpack the trunks for the girls on arrival and put their things away in the way I expect them to be kept.”

Since the thrust of Miss Pope’s remarks is that the girls are provided with a model of behavior which they are expected to conform to in the future, emphasis on the trunks or the unpackers by making the relevant NPs passive subjects in this context injects a jarring note.

Consider also example (73):

- (73) A. “Oh, Kerbey Lane! I was trying to think why that sounded familiar.”
 B. “Yes, Kerbey Lane – Well, the last time we were here we *got backed into*.” (spontaneous utterance)

The context in which the above exchange took place was the following. Speaker A had been told that she and B were to meet some friends for lunch at a cafe in Kerbey Lane. A did not recognize the name until they turned into the street, and then spoke. The topic of the conversation was Kerbey Lane, but it was identified in the minds of the speakers with an accident in a new car on the first occasion they were out driving (and luxuriating) in it, which was also the first time they had been to Kerbey Lane. The irony of the situation as well as the time wasted on a day when they were in a rush heightened the sense of personal injury. This focus on the people rather than the vehicle is expressed in the form of a passive with *we* as the subject. The use of a *get* passive contributes to this sense of injury. (see R. Lakoff, 1971).

Further examples where the referent of an animate passive subject is role prominent are given in (74) to (77). Again, the NPs in question represent a variety of semantic cases. Notice that in none of these sentences could the notion of semantic unity be relevant.

- (74) “‘We’re all going to be wiped out, after we’ve worked so hard . . .’ She sat down, now weeping openly. Joe Gatto rose to say that Mrs. Horvath had said exactly what he said, that a united front was essential There was a confused medley of second-ing. ‘This isn’t getting us anywhere’, Vernon Akers grumbled in

an undertone. 'I didn't come here to *be cried at* by Helen Horvath.'" (Lathen, 1969, p. 87)

- (75) "Several weeks ago my aged exotic British automobile quit on me in the eastbound lane of Enfield Road . . . I raised the bonnet and waited for someone to offer help . . . After 20 minutes of seriously impeding traffic, a kind gentile [sic] lady stopped to inquire if help was coming . . . In the 45 minutes that passed while I was stranded, I was *waved at, smiled at, winked at, stared at, smirked at* and passed by at least 300 people, and only that one lady stopped to offer aid." (Sumner, 1980)
- (76) A. "'But I do see your point of view. Yes, one does like to have one's own proposal.'
B. I was annoyed about it for some time. I wanted to know what it felt like to *be proposed to*.'" (Christie, 1977, p. 203)
- (77) A. Carrie, are you ready for bed?
B. "All ready except for cat."
"Oh Bruce, would you like to *be slept with*?" (spontaneous utterance)

The concepts of theme and rheme (as relating to old and new information) do not appear any more helpful in analyzing most of the above examples than the notion of semantic unity. For example, in (74) and (76) the passive predicate repeats the description of an action described in the preceding context and in fact, characterizes a "new" individual in terms of it. This is just the opposite of how the theme–rheme relationship is supposed to work. On the other hand, in each of the above sentences, the referent of the passive subject NP is at the center of attention vis-à-vis the agent. For example, in (77), the passive focuses, in a way the active alternatives in (78) and (79) do not, on the question of whether the cat wants to sleep alone or accompanied per se.

(78) Oh Bruce, would you like me to sleep with you?¹⁴

(79) Oh Bruce, would you like to sleep with me?

Thus the question is phrased in such a way (the speaker knowing the uncooperative moods of the household cats) as to reflect the greater prominence of the cat and its desires vis-à-vis the speaker and hers.

The next set of examples illustrate role prominence on the part of inanimate objects. The passive subject NPs represent a number of different semantic cases.

- (80) A. (Looking in a book bag for some paper to write an address on)
 "I'm not sure I have any paper."
 B. "A teacher – no paper?"
 A. "All my paper *is written on*." (spontaneous utterance)
- (81) A. Look at the garbage cans all down the street.
 B. Dogs must've been at'em.
 A. "It looks like they were knocked over, not *rooted through*." (spontaneous utterance)
- (82) "Remember that yarn about the two little girls who found what they thought was a string of black beads in a ditch? They were five and six years old – cottage children – and they never said a word to a soul, because last time they found something their mother took it away from them. So they put the beads in an old soap-box and played with them secretly. One little girl died, and the other grew up. And when she was grown up she went to a dance with her young man who was a jeweller's assistant, and she wore the beads. She didn't admire them very much, but she hadn't anything else. As soon as her young man saw them he got all het up and wanted to know how she came by them. He said they were Lady Baldry's famous black pearls, and every jeweller in the trade had a description of them. They and some valuable emeralds had been stolen. The thief was disturbed, and arrested after a cross-country chase. He had the emeralds on him, but he must have thrown away the pearls as he ran. And all those years there they were, knocking about in a dirty old soap-box and *being played with* by a couple of children." (Wentworth, 1965, p. 219)
- (83) "The subject of prayer in the public schools is a difficult one to deal with The thing I remember about prayer when I was in school is the selfish and superficial things that *were prayed for* . . . [examples follow].
 One thing for sure: the public schools need to *be prayed for*, inside and outside the system . . ." (Montgomery, 1982)

In each of the above examples, the referent of the passive subject clearly plays the central role in the situation described by the passive sentence. It is important to note that (82) and (83) could not be handled by the theme analysis, which depends on the notion of degree of newness of information. In (82), the passive *played with* represents already known information, and it is at least as well-known as the existence of the pearls. The first passive

subject in (83) represents newer information than the rheme since it introduces the object of the praying. It is difficult to distinguish degrees of newness in the second passive in (83), as both the schools and the activity of praying for something have already been mentioned. Here they are merely put together.

We would like to discuss in some detail passive subject NPs denoting locations in order to explore the notion of role prominence more deeply. As Bolinger (1975, 1977, 1978) and others have observed (see also Riddle *et al.*, 1977, and Davison, 1980), such NPs do not represent a purely spatial relationship. Consider the sentences in (84)–(88) below:

- (84) This neighborhood is really handy. It's got everything you need close by, but it's so damn ugly. You know, if all these places were organized in one square and then it *was landscaped around*, it just wouldn't be so bad. (spontaneous utterance)
- (85) "Since the trouble started we've been doing all the business we can handle", Mrs. Hartman said, gazing around her snug domain, every scrap of which *was being sat* or *stood* or *leaned upon* by the tobacco-scented, coffee drinking farmers, farm helpers and ranch hands." (Capote, 1965, p. 119)
- (86) *Anne*: I don't like the way some people stand so close to you when you're talking to them, almost right on top of you, with their nose in your face.
Barbara: Well, if you eat enough garlic, you won't have to worry about *being stood near*.
- (87) "There was a singular cold smell about the house which she concluded after a period of interrogation was the smell of absences – the smell of not *being smoked in*, not *being laughed in*, not *being love in*." (cited by Visser, p. 2132)
- (88) "In protracted expectation of the weather clearing up, the last evening paper from London was read and reread with an intensity of interest known only in cases of extreme destitution; every inch of the carpet *was walked over* with similar perseverance; the windows *were looked out of* often enough to justify the imposition of an additional duty upon them..." (Dickens, 1837, p. 709)¹⁵

Although logically speaking the subject NPs which have been pseudo-passivized in (84)–(88) refer to the location of some activity, in these sentences it is the locations themselves which are viewed as central.

Properties are attributed to them, and they are not mentioned as merely the locus of an event. Thus the NPs in question do not function here as locatives with a scene-setting function.

In example (84), the square is role prominent with respect to the agent in the passive clause because the speaker is concerned more with the beautification of the square than with the human effort that would go into the landscaping or the square as a possible site for landscaping.

The interior of the restaurant in (85) is role prominent with respect to the people doing the sitting, standing or leaning. By means of the passive, the writer emphasizes how stuffed with people the restaurant is.

Similarly, in (86), Anne is more role prominent in the situation described than those doing the standing. The concept of someone standing near is relevant only insofar as it relates to her.

In (87), the house is not viewed simply as the place where particular activities might take place. Rather, the house itself is characterized in terms of these activities.

Finally, example (88) occurs in a context describing how several men are impatiently waiting for the weather to clear up so that they can go out. Our interest is in the description of the general scene rather than in who was doing what to relieve his boredom. Thus, the carpet and the windows assume an exaggerated prominence with respect to the agents.

Many grammarians (e.g. Jespersen, 1927) have remarked that one of the functions of the passive is to defocus the agent, and (88) could be accounted for in these terms. However, analysis in terms of role prominence makes it possible to offer a single generalization to handle these examples as well as those cases often viewed as involving thematization. Note that a semantic unity analysis could not even begin to account for examples such as (88).

It is interesting to compare such “locative” passives with sentences containing locative indexicals. The sole, inherent function of the latter is to indicate location in a purely spatial sense. They always have a peripheral, scene-setting function and cannot be used to refer to prominent entities. Compare the examples given below:

- (89)(a) No one ever ate in here.
 - (b) *Here was never eaten in
 - (c) Tour guide: The dining room *was never eaten in*. Just as they were finishing the addition, Mrs. Hacker died, and poor Mr. Hacker closed it up, because it reminded him so much of his wife’s unfulfilled dreams of social success.
- (90)(a) Pointing to an elaborate structure on the front lawn, the guide

said, “The country gentry danced and partied in there on many a fine summer’s evening for nearly a century”.

- (b) *Pointing to an elaborate structure on the lawn, the guide said, “There *was danced* and *partied in* on many a fine summer’s evening for nearly a century”.
- (c) Pointing to an elaborate structure on the lawn, the guide said, “That summerhouse *was danced* and *partied in* on many a fine summer’s evening for nearly a century”.

In the unacceptable (89b) and (90b), the dining room and the summerhouse are presented as locations for particular activities, while in the acceptable (c) examples, properties of the room and the summerhouse are emphasized, making them role prominent.

Temporal NPs behave similarly. NPs describing time can occur as pseudo-passive subjects if they do not function merely as indicators of a time when something occurs. An example of this is given in (91):

- (91) The winter is slept through by a good portion of the animal kingdom.

The point of this sentence is to present a fact about the winter rather than to tell what the animal kingdom is doing at a particular time. However, when a preposition such as *during* is used which has the single, inherent function of signalling a period on a time scale, the sentence is unacceptable:

- (92) *The winter is slept during by a good portion of the animal

Adverbials such as *during the winter* serve solely to modify some action or state, and cannot represent role prominent participants in a situation.

The next set of examples shows that abstract entities, concepts and ideas may be considered role prominent in a particular situation:

- (93) “On the other hand, he entered with all the comprehension of a man who had known spiritual conflict . . . into that state of Maggie’s heart and conscience which made the consent to the marriage a desecration to her: her conscience must not *be tampered with* . . .” (Eliot, 1860, pp. 530–531)
- (94) “As for the theory of accumulation of morphia in the body, the whole thing breaks down, doesn’t it, because it has been dissented from by two doctors, Dr. Ashby and Dr. Harmon.” (cited by Joos, 1964, p. 91)
- (95) “We agreed that his remaining many days in his present hazard was not to be thought of.” (Dickens, 1861, p. 424)

- (96) It should be pointed out, however, that it isn't often as easy to do this as it sounds.

The context of (93) makes it clear that Maggie's spiritual state is of primary concern to the vicar whose thoughts are related here. In other words, her conscience is role prominent.

Example (94) is taken from the transcript of an actual trial. Here, a particular theory is at issue, as indicated by the expression *as for*, rather than the doctor's dissent *per se*, and the theory may therefore be described as role prominent.

A sentential NP describing a state of affairs is the passive subject in (95). The situation described is the center of attention for several pages preceding the occurrence of the sentence.

Example (96) is a particularly difficult example for those wishing to analyze pseudo-passives in terms of theme, as the "extraposed" form of the sentence causes the actual description of the central concept to be part of the rheme. Role prominence, however, which is a psychological notion, does not depend on structure at all. Since the NP *it* stands for a role prominent idea, it occurs as a passive subject.

The examples above may be contrasted with pseudo-passives of other abstract NPs, for example, those expressing a manner or a cause:

- (97) It was getting late and the cries of the trapped men were getting fainter and fainter. *Nevertheless, extreme caution *was worked with* by the rescue crew, for fear of triggering another cave-in.
- (98) *Tim*: Gee, I really feel sorry for Mike. He failed Linguistics 101 and has to repeat it.
Jim: Don't waste your sympathy on him. *His own laziness *was failed through*. He never turned in any of the problems and only did about half of the readings.

In the situations described above, caution and laziness play ancillary rather than central roles. There is no reason to attribute a property to these abstract concepts – they themselves are mentioned to provide further details about or explanation of the behavior of certain people. Since manner and cause NPs, among others, have this inherent descriptive function, it is unlikely that they would ever denote concepts viewed by any speaker as role prominent.

The role prominence analysis handles distransitives quite easily as well. As Bolinger (1975, 1977) has shown (see also Ziv and Sheintuch, 1981 and Sheintuch, 1981), not all passives of oblique NPs in sentences containing a

direct object as well are unacceptable. Some striking examples of passive distransitives we have collected are given below:

- (99) (A woman called in to a radio show on KLBK, Austin during a discussion of a satirical record about the Reagans and said that we shouldn't make fun of our leaders.) *Radio host*: "I disagree. I don't think anyone is above *being poked fun at*." (spontaneous utterance)
- (100) (A man commenting on the 1976 Republican convention on TV evening news)
 "Everytime I sit down I get bumped on the head with a sign and *get dumped confetti on*." (spontaneous utterance)
- (101) (A tells B to close up a built-in ironing board in the kitchen so it won't get used as a counter or shelf.)
 B. Don't worry. "It won't *get put things on*." (spontaneous utterance)
- (102) "'Relations', he finished, lighting a cigarette and speaking from the depths of an experience that consisted of one uncle, and he the most amiable and most unexacting of men who never gave advice, and never criticized, and only wanted sometimes *to be played golf with*, 'are like that. They have to be defied or they'll strangle one.'" (Russell, 1925, p. 180)

As noted in Section 1.2, Bolinger posits an interpretability condition for passive distransitives, offering five factors which contribute to interpretability. Among these factors are the use of an empty verb with a following NP which completes its meaning (e.g. *make a profit*) and the predictability of the verb + noun combination (e.g. *open fire*). Notice that in such cases (see Bolinger's examples in (38)–(44) above), as well as in our examples, the direct object is indefinite and/or non-specific. This is also true of the example Davison cites as being generally ungrammatical, but accepted by at least one speaker (p. 49):

- (103) *This fork has been eaten spaghetti with.

Davison attributes the acceptability for this speaker to lack of an obligatory condition in that dialect that the highest available NP on the hierarchy must be chosen as subject.

A better analysis of all these examples is that the indefiniteness, non-specificity and/or predictability of the direct object NPs contribute to lack of role prominence on their part.¹⁶ In this way, pseudo-passive ditransitives may be handled by the same single condition on passivizability

as all other passives. That is, the presence of a direct object NP normally makes it difficult for an oblique to occur as a passive subject because direct objects usually represent more prominent roles than obliques do. For example, patients or beneficiaries are more likely to be viewed as central participants in an event than locations, times or instruments.

The last set of examples we will discuss appear at first glance to be counterexamples to the role prominence analysis. Consider the following sentences:

(104) ??Australia was lived in by Aunt Martha for a while.

(105) ??England was visited by my friend Jane this summer.

One might be tempted to say that a country ought to be more role prominent than an individual and that therefore (104) (a pseudo-passive) and (105) (a passive) should be acceptable. However, this is an incorrect analysis of role prominence. With respect to the situation being described, i.e. an individual living in a certain place (104) or visiting a certain place (105), it is the individual that would normally be viewed by the speaker as playing the central role. It is not the quality of being well-known or important that makes something role prominent, but the role it plays in a given situation. The most likely reason for a speaker to express the propositions in (104) and (105) is to attribute a property to the people and not to the countries in question. This makes the former and not the latter role prominent. Note that this is the case even though the general topic of conversation may initially have been the country, as in (106):

(106) *Don*: England is a really beautiful country.
Joe: My friend Jane visited England this summer.

In (106), Jane is role prominent with respect to England within the context of her visit to it. Thus role prominence is a separate notion from topic of discourse, unless discourse is defined on the clause level.

To put it another way, the act of visiting a certain country may cause the agent to be viewed as role prominent within that situation, but the property of having been visited by an ordinary individual is not sufficient to cause a country to be viewed as role prominent in that situation.¹⁷

Sentences (104) and (105) contrast with (107) and (108), two attested examples:

(107) “Most men had a higher opinion of Lillian Russell. Since his fan letters could not persuade her to marry him, Hippolyte Schneider, a mechanic, hurled himself over Niagara Falls to his death. England, in Autumn 1894, *was paid a call* by Lillian –

again one jump ahead of American producers. She was presented to the Duke of Wales at the home of Lord Rothschild, who paid her \$2,500 to sing a few numbers.” (Platt, 1978, p. 149)

- (108) “Up and down the room walked Catherine. It was intolerable, she told herself; the whole situation was intolerable. She wouldn’t endure it. She would go away to the ends of the earth, – away, away and never come back to a country *inhabited* by Stephen. (Russell, p. 207)

The whole article from which (107) is taken describes in great detail the extraordinary fame and legend surrounding Lillian Russell, and it is therefore not inappropriate to characterize a country in terms of a visit to it by her. The context preceding and following the passage quoted here gives examples of people on whom Lillian Russell had a great effect. Within the context of this series of examples, England is role prominent with respect to the agent of the visit because it is being presented as a recipient of Lillian Russell’s attention.

In example (108), the presence of Stephen in a particular country is what makes that place noteworthy in Catherine’s mind within the situation described. She wants no part of a place where he may be found.

Another apparent problem for the role prominence analysis is that it could conceivably be viewed as failing to distinguish between passive subject NPs and topicalized NPs. This is not actually the case, however. As mentioned above, Chafe has shown that topicalized NPs have a contrastive force. This is not the same as role prominence. For example, consider (109):

- (109) Now, this one she wouldn’t care for. It’s too bright.

The referent of the subject NP *she* is role prominent in the description of her preferences, but within that context, different likes and dislikes may be contrasted and highlighted, as in the example above.

In contrast to topicalized NPs, subjects (including all passive subjects) represent the significant individuals or concepts against which others are described. Properties are attributed to them because their referents play the most central roles in the situations described by the rest of the clause.

This concludes our arguments for an account of passives, including pseudo-passives, in terms of role prominence.

3. ADVANTAGES OF THE ROLE PROMINENCE ANALYSIS

One advantage of our analysis is that it offers a reason for why passives with first person *by*-phrases as in (110) are normally unacceptable:

(110) *Fries are eaten by me.

If a speaker is also the agent or experiencer, it is unlikely that he or she would view some other participant as role prominent.

In addition, this analysis captures a similarity in distribution between passive subjects and subjects of “tough” sentences, as in the following pairs of sentences:

(111)(a) “Such a dress can’t be sat down in.” (cited by Joos, p. 94)

(b) Such a dress is tough to sit down in.

(112)(a) *Extreme caution can’t be worked with when you have to hurry.

(b) *Extreme caution is tough to work with when you have to hurry.

If, as Schachter argues, role prominence is a general condition on subjecthood in English, and if passives are characterized in terms of role prominence, then it is not surprising that tough constructions, which may also have subjects other than patients (i.e. subject NPs corresponding to obliques), should have a distribution of subject NPs similar to that of passives.

4. SUMMARY

We have argued that pseudo-passives cannot be adequately characterized in terms of semantic unity and transitivity, affectedness, case relations, theme/topic, and conversational implicature. Rather, the crucial condition on the occurrence of any NP as a passive subject is that its referent play the most prominent role in the eyes of the speaker within the situation described by the passive clause. Role prominence (in contrast to the notion of theme) should be considered first a psychological notion, and derivatively a property of subject NPs. The fact that it is not possible to offer an algorithm for determining what causes some entity or concept to be viewed as role prominent does not weaken the analysis. What is important is that speakers have the extralinguistic cognitive ability to make decisions about prominence and that the grammar has access to such information to make it possible for a particular point of view to be conveyed.

NOTES

* We would like to thank Yael Ziv, Paul Neubauer and Andy Rogers for many hours of stimulating discussion, and an anonymous reviewer for a number of helpful comments. All

errors are our own responsibility. The order of the authors' names is merely alphabetical and is not meant to imply degree of contribution to the development of the paper.

¹ We use the term pseudo-passive as a convenient way to refer to the passive of a verb + oblique NP as opposed to that of a verb + direct object for the purposes of discussion. Our conclusion, however, is that the two are examples of the same phenomenon. Not all of the authors discussed use the term pseudo-passive, but we will use it throughout the paper for the sake of having a uniform terminology. Finally, we speak of passives in transformational or derivational terms simply as a kind of lingua franca, and our analysis does not require postulation of a passive rule. An account of passives in any framework must be able to predict which NPs can occur as the subjects of pseudo-passive constructions and which cannot.

² Summaries rather than quotes are given for the preceding linguistic context in most of the examples taken from spontaneous speech since it is extremely difficult to recall the entire context verbatim after hearing a pseudo-passive sentence. Unfortunately, one cannot know in advance that a pseudo-passive will be uttered.

The following punctuation conventions are used in this paper. All attested examples we collected, either from speech or written texts, are given within quotation marks. Examples without quotes were constructed. Where contexts are given for a spontaneous utterance, only the part which was recorded verbatim is given in quotes. The rest is closely reconstructed, but not verbatim context.

Only those passive forms which might be difficult to pick out because they are embedded in a long context have been italicized.

³ The idea that the verb + preposition constitutes a single notion may, however, be relevant to the historical development of pseudo-passives, the earliest known example of which dates from the 13th century, according to Visser. In his extensive historical study of pseudo-passives, van der Gaaf (1930) suggests that "the intimate connection that under certain circumstances was felt to exist between a passive transitive verb and a preposition probably played a part in the origin of the passive of intransitive verbs accompanied by prepositions . . ." (p. 10).

⁴ Traditional transformational terminology is used here to avoid excessive circumlocution and does not imply a theoretical stance on either Bach's or our own part.

⁵ We owe this example to Paul Neubauer.

⁶ Paul Neubauer has pointed out to us that this shows that (32) must have Right Node Raising as its source and it suggests a similar source for (31) as well, despite the indefinite NP. Note that a sentence like (31) is acceptable only if the NP is heavy and occurs at the end of the sentence:

- (i) *I visited and persuaded to vote for me John.
- (ii) ??I visited and persuaded John to vote for me.
- (iii) ??I visited and persuaded a man that I met in the grocery store to vote for me.

Moreover, a sentence like (iv) (which is as acceptable as Bach's example) must have Right Node Raising as its source since few would wish to claim that *think (that) I persuaded to vote for me* is a transitive verb phrase:

- (iv) I visited and think (that) I persuaded to vote for me a man that I met in the grocery store.

Anyone wishing to make this fantastic claim would then have to explain why passive sentences such as the following are unacceptable:

- (v) *John was thought (that) I persuaded to vote for me by Fred.

(from 'Fred thought (that) I persuaded John to vote for me'.) Note that the actual passive of this sentence:

- (vi) John was thought (by Fred) to have been persuaded to vote for me.

must result from two applications of Passive.

We conclude from the above that Bach's conjunction argument actually depends on Right

Node Raising and Heavy NP Shift and is, therefore, not a separate argument from his coherency argument.

⁷ Mathesius discusses pseudo-passives specifically only in passing, but the generalizations about ordinary passives are intended to apply to them as well.

⁸ Davison notes that her analysis would hold equally well for a non-transformational account of passives.

⁹ For example, some verbs, such as *resemble* cannot be passivized. Davison also mentions Green's (1974) discussion of lexical and pragmatic conditions on the passivization of indirect objects. Finally, NPs in adverbials must normally be definite or specific and should preferably refer to concrete entities.

¹⁰ We owe this observation to Paul Neubauer.

¹¹ See Schmerling (1971, 1974, 1976) for arguments against the analysis of stress patterns as "normal" vs. "deviant".

¹² The same objections can be shown to apply to Davison's appeal to Sadock's (1978) reinforceability criterion, which states that it is often possible to reinforce a conversational, but not a conventional, implicature without making the sentence redundant.

¹³ According to Schachter, the topic NP has 'referential prominence' with respect to other NPs in the sentence. An NP which is referentially prominent is definite and has a presupposed reference (i.e. the speaker assumes that his addressee knows the intended referent).

¹⁴ This would imply that the speaker expected to sleep in the cat's sleeping place rather than her own bed.

¹⁵ The pseudo-passive clauses of (85) and (89) were cited by Visser without the preceding linguistic context, pp. 2133 and 391 respectively.

¹⁶ See also Schachter's notion of referential prominence mentioned in Note 13, as well as Ziv and Sheintuch (1981) and Sheintuch's (1981) notion of verbal unit.

¹⁷ Zellig Harris (work in progress) proposes a similar explanation of such sentences. He derives passive sentences from underlying structures where the surface passive subject is the subject of an operator "be in the state of". Thus, ??*America was left by John in 1920* would have as its source *America was in the state of the leaving of it by John*. The passive sentence is unacceptable because it is unreasonable to consider John's having left America as constituting a state attributed to America.

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