

Review Article

To See a World in a Grain of Sand: Review of Legate (2014)

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Voice and v is an investigation of the syntax of an understudied Western Austronesian language, Acehnese, with a particular interest in its implications for the theory of verb phrase structure under the framework of the Minimalist Program. Since Pykkänen’s seminal article, the idea that the functional projection of verb phrases involves two distinct layers—a higher one (that is, *Voice*) that is responsible for introducing the external thematic role and Case-licensing the internal argument, and a lower one (that is, *v*) that is responsible for introducing causative semantics and verbalizing the root—has been advanced in a series of works under the Minimalist Program. This book presents novel evidence for this hypothesis based on an in-depth analysis of Acehnese passive, object voice, and causative constructions. Building on the empirical observations from Acehnese, the book makes further explorations of the syntactic typology of passives and causatives, on which the Acehnese data shed light. It contributes not only to the description and analysis of an understudied language, but also to the cross-linguistic understanding of the different flavors of *Voice* and the architecture of verb phrase structures.

1. INTRODUCTION. Julie Anne Legate’s *Voice and v: Lessons from Acehnese* is a detailed investigation of the syntax of verb phrase structures in Acehnese, an Austronesian language spoken in Aceh, Sumatra, Indonesia. Acehnese is a Chamic language (Malayo-Polynesian) that exhibits a number of traits of the Indonesian-type voice system, including unmarked SVO word order, a two-way voice system, plus the Indonesian-type passive voice, and productive use of prepositions. The rich voice system makes Acehnese ideal for examining the complexity and microvariation of verb phrase structures. The main focus of this work concerns a theory developed under the Minimalist Program, that the functional projection of verb phrases contains at least two distinct layers, *Voice* and *v*, each responsible for the licensing of different syntactic functions (see, for example, Pykkänen 1999, 2002; Cuervo 2003; Collins 2005; Alexiadou, Anagnostopoulou, Schäfer 2006; Merchant 2008; Schäfer 2008; Harley 2009, 2013). This book presents a careful examination of the structures of different types of verb phrases in Acehnese, including passive, object voice, and several distinct types of causatives, which provide novel evidence for this hypothesis. The core arguments of the book are summarized as follows:

- (1) a. The structure of verb phrases involves two distinct semifunctional projections, Voice and *v*. The head of the higher projection, Voice, is associated with voice alternation, object Case-licensing, and introducing external θ -roles; the head of the lower projection, *v*, is responsible for licensing causative semantics (Pylkkänen 1999, 2002).
- b. The differences between passive, object voice, and causative constructions are tied to the variation in the properties of Voice phrase (VoiceP) structure.
- c. Following (b), VoiceP may be associated with ϕ -features that semantically restrict the external argument position; these restricting features may appear either on the Voice head or in the specifier of VoiceP, yielding different types of passive-like constructions observed across languages.

Below I provide a brief summary of the main constructions analyzed in each chapter (section 2), and lay out the core theoretical contributions of this work (section 3). Additional comments and discussions appear in section 4.

2. CONTENTS. The book contains six chapters. Ch. 1 presents the relevant theoretical background and an overview of the book, and introduces the central arguments summarized in (1). It also sketches the constructions discussed in each chapter and the theoretical questions associated with each of them.

The body of the book begins in ch. 2, which focuses on a reexamination of the *LE*-construction in Acehnese. In a *LE*-construction, the initiator of the event is obligatorily preceded by the morpheme *lé*, akin to the *by*-phrase in English (2). A verbal prefix (for example, *di-* in [2]) is obligatorily present in this construction that, at first glimpse, resembles verbal agreement that tracks the third-person familiar feature of the *lé*-marked initiator.

(2) ***LE*-construction**

Lôn di-kap lé uleue nyan.
 1SG 3FAM-bite LE snake DEM

‘I was bitten by the snake.’

(Legate 2014:9)

Prior to this work, the *LE*-construction had attracted particular attention in theoretical syntax due to a previous analysis by Lawler (1977), according to which the *LE*-construction is seen as an instance of *canonical passive*, where the morpheme *lé* is a preposition, and the verbal prefix *di-* realizes obligatory verbal agreement with the “demoted” adjunct initiator licensed by the preposition *lé*. This approach to the *LE*-construction has profound implications for the analysis of passive constructions cross-linguistically, as it lends empirical support to the “demotion” analysis of passivization, which suggests that passivization involves a demotion process of the initiator, prior to which an agreement relation can be established (for example, Perlmutter 1982; Baker 1985; Dryer 1986). Durie (1985, 1987, 1988), on the other hand, analyzes the *LE*-construction as a *theme topic construction* that involves a topicalized theme at the sentence-initial A'-position and an undemoted initiator. Under this approach, the morpheme *lé* is a case marker, and the initiator is the grammatical subject. This avoids the theoretical controversy in assuming verbal agreement with an adjunct initiator. At the same time, it suggests that Acehnese does not possess a true passive voice.

With this background, Legate revisits the *LE*-construction and applies a series of careful diagnostics on the status of the initiator and the theme in the *LE*-construction. She demonstrates that the *LE*-construction is indeed an instance of canonical passive, which involves an adjunct initiator and a theme that bears the grammatical subject status, as argued by Lawler (1977). She then departs from Lawler's analysis by showing that the affixal morphology on the verb in (2), which he analyzed as verbal agreement, is actually the morphological reflex of *external θ -role-introducing Voice head*. This analysis accounts for the prefix's obligatory presence in Acehnese active voice clauses with an unergative/transitive verb (3), as well as its obligatory absence in those with a nonverbal predicate or unaccusative verb, as in (4).

(3) **Active voice (transitive)**

Dokto ka **geu**-peu-ubat Ibrahim.
 doctor PFV 3POL-CAUS-medicine Ibrahim

'The doctor has treated Ibrahim.'

(Legate 2014:47)

(4) **Active voice (unaccusative)**

Dokto ka (***geu**)-troh.
 doctor PFV 3POL-arrive

'The doctor arrived.'

(Legate 2014:30)

Building on this analysis, Legate proposes a novel account for passives, according to which (i) canonical passives involve *the projection of Voice* that introduces the external θ -role (although such constructions do not license the initiator as a core argument), (ii) the external argument position in canonical passives is existentially bound and semantically tied to the initiator θ -role assigned by the *by*-phrase to its DP complement, and (iii) Voice may be associated with restrictive ϕ -features (for example, person, number, animacy) that constrain the selection of the initiator, which is overtly realized in Acehnese passives as a verbal prefix (2).

Ch. 3 turns to a second type of nonactive voice in Acehnese, characterized by the fronting of the theme and the placement of the initiator pre-adjacent to the verb. Importantly, the verbal prefix present in passive voice is obligatorily absent in this construction (henceforth referred to as *the bare construction* in the book), as exemplified in (5).

(5) **The bare construction (Object voice)**

Ibrahim ka dokto (***geu**)-peu-ubat.
 Ibrahim PFV doctor 3POL-CAUS-medicine

'Ibrahim was treated by the doctor.'

(Legate 2014:47)

Legate presents compelling arguments showing that the bare construction is an instance of *Indonesian-type object voice*, which involve a fronted theme that occupies the grammatical subject position and an in-situ initiator. She then addresses the issue of why this construction does not trigger a locality violation, adopting the conventional view that the initiator in Indonesian-type object voice is inherently Case-licensed by Voice (for example, Cartier 1979; Hopper 1983; Verhaar 1988; Arka and Manning 1998; Aldridge 2008; Connors 2008); hence, the initiator is "immobile" and remains at its theta-position, forcing the theme to raise to the subject position. Having proposed her analyses of passive and object voice in Acehnese, Legate considers their implications for a typology of

related constructions. There, she discusses how the Acehnese facts provide novel evidence against the influential “*smuggling*” approach to passives proposed in Collins (2005), according to which the *by*-marked initiator in English passives remains in its theta position, with the theme inside a VP moving across the initiator and eventually becoming the grammatical subject (thus, the term “*smuggling*”). Legate points out that the *smuggling* approach fails to distinguish canonical passives from Indonesian-type object voice, and argues that the cooccurrence of passive and object voice in Acehnese and related Indonesian-type languages provides empirical support for the distinction between the two constructions, favoring the conventional treatment that canonical passives involve an *adjunct initiator*, rather than an immobile external argument.

Following the discussion of Acehnese passive and object voice, chapter 4 surveys a cline of cross-linguistically observed passive-like constructions, from the *grammatical object passive* in Icelandic and Ukrainian, to the *impersonal* constructions in Polish, Breton, and Irish. Both constructions are characterized by an Accusative-marked theme and the absence of an overt subject initiator (6), (7). *Grammatical object passives* employ no special agreement morphology on the verb, and can optionally license an adjunct initiator, as exemplified in the Ukrainian example (6), which shows an optional adjunct initiator marked by the instrumental case. *Impersonals*, on the other hand, exhibit special “impersonal” agreement on the verb that specifies the number and animacy features of an unpronounced initiator (for example, [+sentient], [+plural], [+human]), while disallowing an adjunct initiator, as shown in the Polish example (7).

- (6) UKRAINIAN: **Grammatical object passive**
 Cerkvu bulo zbudovano (Lesevym).
 church.F.ACC be.PST.N build.PTCP Lesiv.INST
 ‘The church was built by Lesiv.’ (Legate 2014:93–94)

- (7) POLISH: **Impersonal**
 Jana obrabowano (*przez nich).
 Jan.ACC robbed.IMPERS by them
 ‘They robbed Jan (*by them).’ (Legate 2014:96)

In light of the Acehnese facts, Legate proposes a new typology of passives, where the divergences among (a) canonical passives, (b) grammatical object passives, (c) impersonal constructions, and (d) object voice are attributed to the locus and to properties of the restrictive features that constrain the external argument position. This proposal is one of the main contributions of the book, and will be discussed further in section 3.

Ch. 5 focuses on Acehnese causatives, and demonstrates how these constructions present novel evidence for Pyłkkänen’s (1999, 2002) proposal that Voice and *v* are two distinct layers within the verb phrase. The main piece of evidence lies in Acehnese lexical causatives (8), which contain a single VoiceP with the causative morpheme *peu-* appearing between the morphological reflex of Voice (that is, the verbal prefix) and the root. The argument for the independence of Voice from *v* thus lies in the observation that the verbal prefix (that is, Voice) can disappear independently in appropriate environments, with the morphological reflex of the *v* (that is, the causative affix) present alone. Legate demonstrates that, while the verbal prefix *geu-* is always present in causatives like (8), signaling the presence of a Voice head, it must be absent when the same structure is embedded

under typical restructuring verbs such as ‘try’, as in (9). Under the standard analysis that the complements of restructuring verbs are structurally deficient, lacking the projection of a *Voice* layer (Wurmbrand 2001), the absence of the verbal prefix (the morphological reflex of *Voice*) inside the complements and the presence of the causative affix (the morphological reflex of *v*) in the same environment (9) thus provides direct support for the independence of *Voice* from *v*:

(8) **Lexical causative**

Hasan **geu**-peu-reubah aneuk nyan.
 Hasan 3POL-CAUS-fall child DEM
 ‘Hasan caused the child to fall.’ (Legate 2014:116)

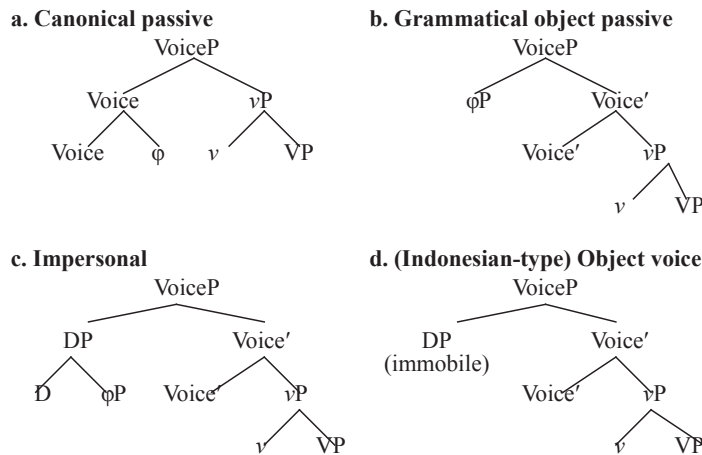
(9) **Causative under restructuring**

Ureueng agam nyan *geu*-cuba [(***geu**)-peu-ngop peurahô nyan].
 person make DEM POL-try 3POL-CAUS-sink boat DEM
 ‘The man tried to sink the boat.’ (Legate 2014:118)

Ch. 6 concludes the book by summarizing the main claims from each chapter and revisits the main proposals summarized in (1a–c).

3. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS. The central idea of this work concerns a core assumption of the Minimalist Program, namely that Universal Grammar has only one computational system, and any variation between languages reduces to differences in an inventory of functional elements from which each particular language makes its selection (Chomsky 1995). In this book, Legate illustrates compellingly how changes in selection yield distinct constructions within and across languages. Under the analyses developed in chs. 3 and 4, the divergences among canonical passive, grammatical object passive, impersonal, and object voice are attributed to the microvariation of feature specification in *VoiceP*, as illustrated in (a–d) in figure 1.

FIGURE 1. DIFFERENT FLAVORS OF VOICE AND THE STRUCTURES THEY YIELD†



† From Legate (2014:107–8).

The specific analysis for each construction is summarized as follows. *Canonical passives*, such as the Acehnese *LE*-construction and equivalent constructions in Indonesian, Chamorro, and Balinese, are proposed to license the restrictive ϕ -features on the *Voice head* (fig. 1a); this accounts for the observation that both Acehnese active and passive clauses employ a verbal prefix that carries the person and politeness features of the initiator, indicating the presence of a Voice head with restrictive ϕ -features in both clause types. The *grammatical object passive* constructions in Icelandic and Ukrainian are claimed to place these features in the *specifier of VoiceP* (fig. 1b), whereas the *impersonal* constructions in Polish, Irish, and Breton are analyzed as adding a D head to the ϕ -features, changing the features from *restricting* to *saturating* (fig. 1c). This accounts for the shared properties between grammatical object passives and impersonals in (6) and (7), both of which exhibit an implicit initiator θ -licensed by Voice and an Accusative-marked theme (thus satisfying Burzio's generalization), and further captures the observations that (i) *grammatical object passives* can optionally license a *by*-phrase initiator, while *impersonals* cannot, and (ii) *impersonals* exhibit special verbal agreement that indicates the presence of an unpronounced initiator DP carrying specific restrictive ϕ -features, such as [+human], [+sentient/volitional], or [+plural] (7). Finally, Indonesian-type *object voice* is analyzed as having an immobile external argument that undergoes Spell-out on the VoiceP phase (fig. 1d). As such, the proposed analysis captures the core traits of the four constructions, and offers a unified account for the microvariation of passive-like structures across languages.

4. COMMENTS. This book is one of the first systematic studies of verb phrase structure in Indonesian-type languages under the Minimalist framework. It is written with an excellent balance of theoretical finesse and empirical description, and demonstrates how advancements in theory and diagnostic tools can bring new light to old data. Apart from contributing to the description and analysis of Acehnese, the book also contributes to the cross-linguistic understanding of passives and causatives by drawing on data from languages that are closely related to Acehnese, as well as from typologically diverse languages outside the Austronesian family. By attributing divergences in passive and causative to the different flavors of Voice, Legate offers an elegant solution to the empirical variations that greatly enriches the current understanding of the typology of Voice and *v*.

Despite the thoroughness and various strengths of the book, one important issue in the analysis of Acehnese object voice is left unaddressed; namely, the presence of the verbal prefix in Acehnese Active and Passive voice on the one hand, and its obligatory absence in Object voice on the other. Under the analysis developed in ch. 2 (and revisited in ch. 5) that the verbal prefix is the morphological realization of an *external θ -role introducing Voice head*, its absence in Object voice is unexpected. This is an apparent gap in the analyses proposed in this work. In a footnote in ch. 2, Legate suggests a potential analysis of this gap based on the *Doubly Filled Voice Filter* (Sportiche 1992), as has been explored in Travis (2000) and Pearson (2001) for related languages (fn. 25, p. 146). A fully developed solution to this issue will require future investigation.

In sum, *Voice and v: Lessons from Acehnese* is an important contribution to Austronesian syntax and current refinements of the Minimalist Program. For readers interested in

theoretically challenging data, it offers a thorough discussion of the basic clause structures in Acehnese and related languages; for readers who adopt the Minimalist Program, it provides extensive discussions and novel evidence for the latest theory of verb phrase structures. Finally, for readers with a particular interest in comparative syntax, this is also a valuable work that enriches our knowledge of passive and causative across languages.

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