

What passes for a passive?  
An investigation of passive participles in  
Hungarian

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## 1 Passive types and the structural approach

- traditional distinction between adjectival and verbal/eventive passives (e.g. Wasow 1977):

- (1) a. John was very embarrassed (\*by Mary). [adjectival passive]  
b. John was (\*very) arrested (by Mary). [verbal passive]

- recent developments: ternary distinction between eventive passives and two types of stative passives: target states/stative participles and resultant states/resultatives (cf. Parsons 1990, Kratzer 2000, Embick 2004):

1. **eventive/verbal passive**: describes an event and must involve an agent

- (2) The door was (recently) opened (by John).

2. **resultant states**: stative with event implications, but no agentivity

- (3) The door is (recently) opened (\*by John).  
[opening event precedes the resulting state]

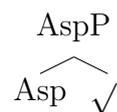
3. **target states:** no event implications, no agentivity

- (4) a. The door is (\*recently) open (\*by John).  
 b. The door was built open/\*opened.

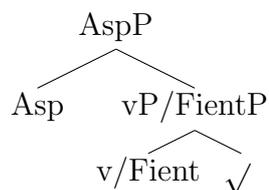
• accommodating resultant states: approaches to the passive

1. The Lexicalist approach (e.g. Wasow 1977)
2. Adjunction to phrase/head (e.g. Jackendoff 1977, Abney 1987)
3. The structural approach (Kratzer 1994, Embick 2004):
  - all passive types are handled in the syntax
  - the passive participial affix (AspP) attaches to different structural positions: different passive types are associated with different amounts of syntactic structure <sup>1</sup>

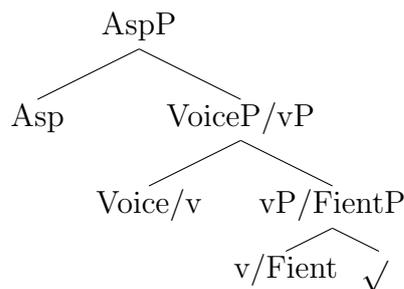
(5) a. Target state (TS):



b. Resultant state (RS):



c. Eventive passive:




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<sup>1</sup>On affixation to different positions in general, see the recent DM approach, e.g. Marantz 1997, Alexiadou 2001, and Bartos 2008 on active/passive adverbial participles in Hungarian

**Interim summary:** (i) target states are neither eventive nor agentive, (ii) resultant states have event implications but not agentivity, and (iii) verbal passives involve both eventivity and agentivity.

**Question:** is there morphological evidence for the existence of RS?  
E.g. in English/Greek, RS has the same morphological form as eventives/TS<sup>2</sup>:

- (6) The door was opened. [eventive/RS]
- (7) a. Ta lasticha ine (akoma) fuskomena.  
'The tires are still pumped-up.'  
b. Ta ruxa ine (\*akoma) stegnomena.  
'The clothes are (still) dried.'

## 2 Hungarian passive constructions: T and vA

Extensive literature on *-T* and *-vA* participles (with the *pros* and *cons* of the passive approach) e.g. Komlósy (1992, 1994), Alberti (1994 and 1996), Laczkó (1995, 1999, 2000, 2005), Kenesei (2000), Tóth (2000), É. Kiss (1998, 2002), Bene (2005), Horváth and Siloni (2005), Kertész (2005), Németh (2007), Bartos (2008).

- **Passive-like properties:** (i) the external argument demotes, (ii) the Accusative of the object is lost, and (iii) in copula + vA participles, the internal argument (theme/patient) will function as the subject.

- **Distribution:**

1. *-T* participles:

– can only be used attributively (e.g. Laczkó 2000, Kenesei 2000):

- (8) a. a felfújt gumimatrac  
the prt-inflate-T beach-mattress  
'the inflated beach mattress'

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<sup>2</sup>The Greek example is from Anagnostopoulou (2003).

- b. \*A gumimatrac *felújt*.  
 the beach-mattress prt-inflate-T  
 'The beach mattress is inflated.'

– a limited number of *-T* participles can occur predicatively (ex. 9): these behave as ordinary adjectives, as they are gradable, lose their argument structure and can be modified as adjectives (cf. Laczkó 1995, 2000, Kenesei 2000).

- (9) Péter volt a *legmeglepettebb*. [gradability]  
 Peter was the prt-surprise-T-superlative  
 'Peter was the most surprised'

2. Passive *-vA* participles:

– can only be used predicatively, as the complement of the copula (or the predicate of a small clause)  
 – two different copulas may combine with *-vA* participles: the 'stative' *van/volt* ('is/was') and the 'eventive' *lett/lesz* ('became/will be(come)'):

- (10) a. A feladat meg *van/volt oldva*.  
 the task prt is solve-vA  
 'The task is/was solved.'
- b. A feladat meg *lett oldva*.  
 the task prt became solve-vA  
 'The task became solved.'

• **Argument structure** of the base verb:

1. *-T* participles: productively formed from transitive (TR) and unaccusative (UA) verbs (e.g. Laczkó 2000, 2005)

- (11) a. a *megoldott* feladatok  
 the prt-solve-T tasks  
 'the solved tasks'
- b. a *lehullott* falevelek  
 the prt-fall-T leaves  
 'the fallen leaves'

- c. \*<sub>a</sub> *táncolt* férfi  
 the dance-T man  
 'the danced man'

2. *-vA* participles: *van/volt + vA* participles combine with transitive or unaccusative verbs (e.g. Laczkó 2005), whereas *lett + vA* constructions are only compatible with transitive verbs (cf. Bene 2005, Németh 2007):

- (12) a. A feladat meg *van/lett oldva*.  
 the task prt is/became solve-vA  
 'The task is/became solved.'
- b. \*A férfi *táncolva van/lett*.  
 the man dance-vA is/became  
 'The man is/became danced.'
- c. Az összes falevél le *van/\*lett hullva*.  
 the all leaf prt is/became fall-vA  
 'All the leaves are/\*became fallen.'

- literature on the **adjectival/verbal nature** of *-T* and *-vA* participles:

(13)

	-T participles	-vA participles
Alberti (1994, 1996)	0	verbal
Tóth (2000)	0	adjectival (RS)
Horváth and Siloni (2005)	adjectival	0
Laczkó (1995, 2005)	verbal	adjectival

**Interim summary:** *-T* participles are attributive, whereas passive *-vA* participles are used predicatively, as the complement of the copula *van/volt* ('is/was') or *lett* ('became')<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>For now, I put aside the non-copular uses of passive *-vA*. Note, however, that these are predicative, too.

**Research question:** What is the correlation between the Hungarian passive participles and the recently proposed three-way distinction between eventive passives and the two types of adjectival passives?

### 3 Diagnostics

1. Standard tests that I will *not* use to **diagnose the eventivity** of the participle:

- exact point of time: *tegnap négykor* ('yesterday at four')

(14) The door was opened yesterday at four. [eventive/stative]

(15) a. Az ajtó tegnap négykor ki lett nyitva.  
 the door yesterday four-at prt became open-vA  
 'The door was opened yesterday at four.' [eventive]

b. Az ajtó tegnap négykor ki volt nyitva.  
 the door yesterday four-at prt was open-vA  
 'The door was opened yesterday at four.' [stative]

- *alatt* ('in an hour') (*iff* telicity goes hand in hand with eventivity!)

(16) A kert két óra alatt lett/\*volt megöntözve.  
 the garden two hour under became/was water-vA  
 'The garden was watered in two hours.'

- adverbs such as *gyorsan* ('quickly')

(17) A kerítés gyorsan le lett/\*volt festve.  
 the fence quickly prt became/was paint-vA  
 'The fence was quickly painted.'

- counterfactuality

(18) a. A matekpélda majdnem ki volt dolgozva.  
 the math-assignment almost prt was work-vA  
 'The math assignment was almost worked out.' [no  
 counterfactual reading]

- b. A matekpélda majdnem ki lett dolgozva.  
 the math-assignm. almost prt became work-vA  
 'The math assignment was almost worked out.' [counterfactual reading available]

**Problem:** the 'eventive/stative tests' above seem to correlate with the eventivity/stativity (and telicity) of the copula. That is, these tests are all sensitive to the properties of the *copula*, not the participle.

2. Standard tests that I *will* use to tell apart target states, resultant states and eventive passives:

- Free/unlimited use of **by-phrases**: eventive passive
- The adverb ***mostanában*** ('recently') has event implications (cf. ex. 19): therefore, it is only compatible with R states and eventive passives (vs. T states). If a state can be modified by 'recently', it is an R state (cf. 20).

- (19) a. Az az ablak nyitva van, de soha senki  
 that the window open-vA is but never noone  
 nem nyitotta ki.  
 not opened prt  
 'That window is open(ed), but it has never been opened.' [Ambiguous: the wind ripped it open OR the window is built open → opening event is not necessary]

- b. Az az ablak mostanában nyitva van, de  
 that the window recently open-vA is but  
 soha senki nem nyitotta ki.  
 never noone not opened prt  
 'That window is recently opened, but it has never been opened.' [The 'built open' reading is unavailable → 'mostanában' has event implications. ]

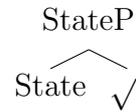
- (20) a. Az ablak mostanában ki van nyitva.  
 the window recently prt is open-vA  
 'The window is recently opened.'

- The adverb *még mindig* ('still') cannot co-occur with R states: it is used to identify T states (from Kratzer 2000):

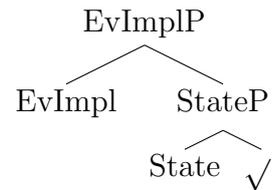
- (21) a. Die Reifen sind immer noch aufgepumpt.  
'The tires are still pumped up.'
- b. Das Theorem ist (\*immer noch) bewiesen.  
'The theorem is (\*still) proven.'
- (22) a. A gumimatrac még-mindig fel van fújva.  
the beach-mattress still prt is inflate-vA  
'The beach mattress is still inflated.'
- b. \*A tétel még-mindig be van bizonyítva.  
the theorem still prt is prove-vA  
'The theorem is still proven.'

**Structurally:**

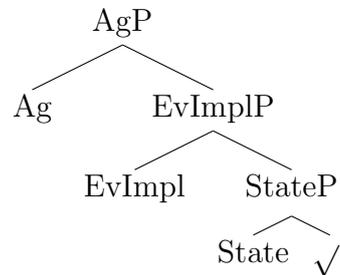
- (23) a. Target state (TS):



- b. Resultant state (RS):



- c. Eventive passive:



## 4 Results

Tests employed: *by*-phrases, 'recently' and 'still'.

- -*T* participles

- (24) a. a (tegnap négykor) még betört ablak  
the yesterday four-at still prt-break-T window  
'the window that was (in a) broken (state) yesterday at 4'
- b. a mostanában betört ablak  
the recently prt-break-T window  
'the window that has been broken recently' [eventive]
- c. a mostanában BETÖRT ablak  
the recently prt-break-T window  
'the window that is recently broken'
- d. a vandálok által (tegnap) betört ablak  
the vandals by prt-break-T window  
'the window that was broken by the vandals'

- *van/volt* ('is/was') + *vA*

- (25) a. Az ablak még be van/volt törve  
the window still prt is/was break-vA  
'The window is/was still broken.'
- b. Az ablak mostanában be van/volt törve  
the window recently prt is/was break-vA  
'Recently, the window is (in a) broken (state).'
- c. \*Az ablak a vandálok által van/volt betörve  
the window the vandals by is/was prt-break-vA  
'The window is/was broken by the vandals.'

- *lett* ('became') + *vA*

- (26) a. \*Az ablak (négykor) még be lett törve.  
 the window (four-at) still prt became break-vA  
 'The window became still broken at four.'
- b. Az ablak mostanában be lett törve.  
 the window recently prt became break-vA  
 'Recently, the window has become broken.' [eventive]
- c. Az ablak a vandálok által lett betörve.  
 the window the vandals by became prt-break-vA  
 'The window was broken by the vandals.'

(27) Summary of the passive types in Hungarian:

	-T	volt + vA	lett + vA
target state	OK	OK	*
resultant state	OK[Foc]	OK	*
eventive passive	OK	@	OK

**NB.** These tests do *not* reflect the properties of the copula (e.g. same copula with/without event implications; different copulas, both with event implications etc.)

**NB2.** It is not the Aktionsart of the verb that determines whether the construction is eventive or stative.

**Question1:** Is agentivity really a property of the participle?

- (28) a. A paradicsom a naptól volt/lett piros. [cause]  
 the tomato the sun-from was/became red  
 'The tomato was/became ripe from the sun.'
- b. \*A paradicsom a nap által volt/lett piros. [agent]  
 the tomato the sun by was/became red  
 'The tomato was/became ripe by the sun.'

**Question2:** What is the role of the copula?

## 5 So what does the copula do?

The division of labour between the copula and the participle is detected via a systematic comparison of *copula + adjective* and *copula + vA* constructions:

- **agentivity** is contributed by the participle (cf. 28)
- **the stative/eventive reading** is contributed by the copula

- (29) a. Tegnap 7-kor az egész városban sötét volt.  
yesterday 7-at the whole city-in dark was  
'Yesterday at 7, it was dark in the whole city.'
- b. Tegnap 7-kor az egész városban sötét lett.  
yesterday 7-at the whole city-in dark became  
'Yesterday at 7, it became dark in the whole city.'

- (30) a. Az ablak tegnap négykor be volt törve.  
the window yesterday 4-at prt was broken  
'Yesterday at 4, the window was broken.'
- b. Az ablak tegnap négykor be lett törve.  
the window yesterday 4-at prt became broken  
'Yesterday at 4, the window got broken.'

- **telicity:**

(i) *volt* ('was') is ambiguous between a telic and atelic reading, while *lett* ('became') is telic.

- (31) a. A városban néhány percig sötét volt.  
the city-in few minute-for dark was  
'The city was dark for a few minutes.'
- b. \*A városban néhány percig sötét lett.  
the city-in few minute-for dark became  
'The city became dark for a few minutes.'

- (32) a. %A városban néhány perc alatt sötét volt.  
 the city-in few minute-in dark was  
 'The city was dark in a few minutes.'
- b. A városban néhány perc alatt sötét lett.  
 the city-in few minute-in dark became  
 'The city became dark in a few minutes.'

(ii) the telicity of the construction is determined by the copula<sup>4</sup>

(33)

	atelic copula	telic copula
state	<i>volt</i> /stative p./	*
activity	<i>volt</i> /stative p./	*
achievement	<b><i>volt</i></b> /stative p./	<i>volt</i> /?/ and <i>lett</i> /eventive p./
accomplishment	<b><i>volt</i></b> /stative p./	<i>volt</i> /?/ and <i>lett</i> /eventive p./

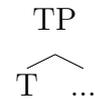
- (34) a. A ház (napokig) rendőrökkel volt körülvéve.  
 the house (days-for) policemen-with was surround-vA  
 '(For days), the house was surrounded with policemen.'
- b. A macska volt már cirógatva.  
 the cat was already pet-vA  
 'The cat was already petted.'
- c. Az ablak hetekig be volt törve.  
 the window weeks-for prt was break-vA  
 'The window was broken for weeks.'
- d. A gumicsónak napokig fel volt fújva.  
 the rubberboat days-for prt was pump-vA  
 'The rubberboat was pumped up for days.'

<sup>4</sup>Copula + vA constructions are scarce but available with certain state verbs, e.g. 'surround' (vs. \*'love'); and, with a handful of activity verbs such as 'clean', copula + vA is progressive: 'The room is being cleaned'.

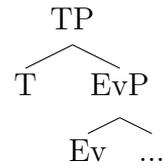
- (35) a. Az ablak pillanatok alatt be lett/volt törve.  
 the window seconds under prt became/was break-vA  
 'The window was broken in a few seconds.'
- b. A gumicsónak 10 perc alatt fel lett/volt fújva.  
 the boat 10 minute under prt became/was inflate-vA  
 'The rubberboat was inflated in ten minutes.'

**Question** to be answered (under construction): what is the lexical entry of the two types of the copula?

- (36) a. Copula (van/volt):



- b. Copula (lett/lesz, maybe telic 'volt'):



## 6 What does the adjectival/eventive distinction buy us?

### 6.1 Generalizations about argument structure

There are two crosslinguistic generalizations concerning passive formation, which accord with the general pattern observed in Hungarian (cf. §2 on the argument structure of the base verb):

1. **Unaccusatives do not form eventive passives** (Burzio 1986, Jaeggli 1986) → UA with *lett + vA* are ungrammatical (cf. Bene (2005) above)
2. **Unergatives do not form adjectival passives** (e.g. Levin and Rapoport Hovav 1995, Anagnostopoulou 2007, cf. also Tóth 2000). → UE

with *van/volt + vA* and UE with (stative) *-T* participles are ungrammatical <sup>5</sup>

(37) Predictions about argument structure and *-T* participles:

	AdjPass	EvPass
TR	yes ✓	yes ✓
UA	yes ✓	<b>no</b> [?]
UE	<b>no</b> ✓	n/a

(38) Predictions about argument structure and *-vA* participles:

	AdjPass	EvPass
TR	yes ✓	yes ✓
UA	yes ✓	<b>no</b> ✓
UE	<b>no</b> [?]	n/a

**Apparent counterexamples** [?]:

- **Eventive unaccusatives?**

Example (39) is not stative: but is it *active* or *eventive passive*?<sup>6</sup>

Do we have a reliable test to diagnose 'eventive passiveness' with unaccusatives (as 'agentivity' is unavailable)?

(39) a tegnap négykor leesett/összetört váza  
the yesterday four-at prt-fall-T/prt-break-T vase  
'the vase that fell/broke yesterday at four.'

<sup>5</sup>In Hungarian, as in many other languages, unergatives do not form eventive passives, either. (Potential exceptions: % *telefonálva/szólva lett neki* 'there was phoned to her/somebody had a word with her').

<sup>6</sup>Cf. also Laczkó (1999, 2000) on the 'extended passive', on journalese *-T* and on whether *-vA2* is comparable to *-T*.

1. *Or do (attributive) unaccusative eventive passives actually exist?*  
 Swedish furnishes morphological evidence for the existence of *attributive eventive passives* formed from unaccusative verbs (cf. Lundquist 2008) (and, therefore, against generalization (1) above!).

- (40) a. Han har skjut<sub>it</sub> djuret.  
           he has shoot.SUP animal.DEF  
           'He has shot the animal.'
- b. Djuret blev skjut<sub>et</sub>.  
           animal.DEF became shoot.DE  
           'The animal was shot.'
- c. ett skjut<sub>et</sub> djur  
           a shoot.DE animal  
           'a shot animal'
- (41) a. Skeppet har sjunkit/försvunnit.  
           ship.DEF has sink.SUP/disappear.SUP  
           'The ship has sunk/disappeared.'
- b. ett sjunket/försvunnet skepp  
           a sink.DE/disappear.DE ship  
           'a sunk/disappeared ship'

2. *The active account:*

Is *-T* the past counterpart of telic *-Ó<sub>post</sub>* (which expresses anteriority in the future)? Could the appearance of *journalese -T* tip the balance in favor of the active unaccusative *-T*? Or else what accounts for the lack of atelic UA eventive passives?<sup>7</sup>

- (42) a. a most száradó ruhák [atelic simultaneous]  
           the now dry-*Ó* clothes  
           'the clothes that are drying now'

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Laczko (1999, 2000) on the aspectual distribution of *-Ó* and *-T* in the case of UA verbs. The issues raised here relate to his work to a significant extent; (42) is based on his examples, as well.

- b. a holnap délre megszáradó ruhák [telic fut. ant.]  
 the tomorrow noon-by prt.dry-Ó clothes  
 'the clothes that will have dried by tomorrow noon'
- c. a tegnap délre megszáradt ruhák [telic past ant.]  
 the yesterday noon-by prt.dry-T clothes  
 'the clothes that dried by yesterday noon'
- d. %a sokáig száradt ruhák [atelic anterior]  
 the long-for dry-T clothes  
 'the clothes that have been drying for a long time'

(43) Summary: active or eventive passive?<sup>8</sup>

passive type	telicity	IA[TR]	IA[UA]	EA[TR]	EA[UE]
active	atelic	...	-Ó (%T <sub>ant</sub> ?)	-Ó (,%T <sub>ant</sub> )	-Ó (,%T <sub>ant</sub> )
	telic	...	-Ó <sub>post</sub> , -T <sub>ant</sub> (?)	-Ó (,%T <sub>ant</sub> )	-Ó (,%T <sub>ant</sub> )
eventive passive	atelic	-T	—	—	—
	telic	-T	— or -T <sub>ant</sub> (?)	—	—
adjectival passive	atelic	-T	-T	—	—
	telic	-T	-T	—	—

• **Unergatives as adjectival passives** (cf. Tóth 2000)

Unergative verbs that participate in the transitive/'antipassive' alternation (BUT no 'real' unergatives, cf. (12)) can form *van/volt + vA* participles → underlying transitivity of these verbs/participles:

- (44) a. A szoba ki volt takarítva.  
 the room prt was clean-vA  
 'The room was cleaned.'
- b. (A szobában) ki volt takarítva.  
 the room-in prt was clean-vA  
 'It was cleaned (in the room).'

<sup>8</sup>Table (41) is partly based on Laczkó's (1999, 2000) categorization of -T and -Ó participles along the dimension of active/ passive and anterior/ simultaneous aspectual features.

The claim that these verbs are regarded as 'transitive' by passivization is confirmed by the fact that they behave like transitives (and not unergatives!) in verbal passives, too.

- (45) a. (A szobában) ki lett takarítva.  
 the room-in prt became clean-vA  
 'It was cleaned (in the room).'
- b. \*(A szobában) énekelve lett.  
 the room-in sing-vA became  
 'It/there was sung (in the room).'

## 6.2 Suppression vs. PRO

<sup>9</sup> Follows if the stative/eventive distinction is made: adjectival passives have no implicit agent (cf. (46a) from Kratzer 1994), while eventive passives do involve a Casemarked (PP) or Caseless (*ie.* invisible PRO<sup>10</sup>) agent (Michal Starke, *pc.*)<sup>11</sup>:

- (46) a. Das Kind war gekämmt.  
 the child was combed  
 'The child was combed (by him/herself or someone else).'
- b. Das Kind wurde gekämmt.  
 the child became combed  
 'The child was combed (by someone else).'

(47a) is eventive and involves an agent, while in the stative (47b) the agent is absent:

- (47) a. a (Péter által/PRO) tegnap 4-kor megírt lecke  
 the Peter by/PRO yesterday 4-at prt-write-T homework  
 'the homework done (by Peter/PRO) yesterday at 4'

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Laczkó (2000), Kenesei (2000, 2005) and Laczkó (2005).

<sup>10</sup>If the barker in *a tegnap 4-kor megugatott kislú* ('the boy who was barked at yesterday at 4') can be non-human, we need to allow for "PRO" that can potentially be uncontrolled and non-arbitrary. See also Laczkó (2005).

<sup>11</sup>The PP/PRO alternation is the textbook case for the Case Filter.

- b. a (\*Péter által) tegnap 4-kor MEGÍRT lecke  
 the Peter by yesterday 4-at prt-write-T homework  
 'the homework that was (in a) done (state) yesterday at 4'

## 7 Conclusions

1. Hungarian has target states, resultant states and eventive passives, both attributively (-*T*) and predicatively (-*vA*).
2. Morphology only encodes a positional, – and not structural – difference.
3. In Hungarian, eventivity is contributed by the copula, while agentivity can be ascribed to the participle. This observation can easily be captured by a structural approach.

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