The interaction between passive constructions and lexical verb constructions in Swedish

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Abstract

In this study I approach the question of passive choice in Swedish from a lexical perspective. Swedish has two types of passive, a morphological passive formed with the ending -s and a periphrastic passive formed with an auxiliary and the past participle of the verb. The latter passive has two variants, the bli-passive and the vara-passive with different auxiliaries (bli ‘become’, vara ‘be’). The s-passive is the unmarked passive, whereas the periphrastic passive is subject to restrictions of use. The overall reasons for the choice between the two passives is well known, but a great deal of variation can be detected behind the neat general patterns. Searches in a corpus of about 40 million words reveal that only a few verbs are frequently used in more than one passive type, but even so, there are such verbs. Factors turning up behind the alternation — additional to verb meaning and type of subject — are text type, genre, semantic frame, and the dimension known—unknown for the subject. Moreover, many collocational patterns appear, and to some extent, no clear reason for a choice can be found. On the basis of these variable patterns I discuss the problems of describing constructions. What factors belong to which level of generality of the description? Is the text type or frame, for instance, a general factor or is it verb specific? Do statistical data need to be accounted for? In my study I present more questions than I have answers for. For me, with a background in lexicography, Construction Grammar is an appealing theory since it takes meaning into account; but the ambition to describe “everything” through the same formality and to include all phenomena between syntax and lexicon is a challenge.

1. Introduction

Swedish has two types of passive, a morphological passive formed with the ending -s, and a periphrastic passive formed with the past participle in combination with a copula verb, either bli ‘become’ or vara ‘be’ (1). The examples in (1) are not authentic, but they are created on the basis of typical occurrences. The abbreviation Pcp will be used for past participle in formal notations in this paper.

(1) a Huset var bygg-t i trä.
   house-DEF be-PRET build-PCP-NEU in wood
   ‘the house was built of wood’

b Huset blev bygg-t tio år senare.
   house-DEF become-PRET build-PCP-NEU ten years later
   ‘the house was built ten years later’

c Huset var bygg-t i trä.
   house-DEF be-PRET build-PCP-NEU in wood
   ‘the house was built of wood’

The periphrastic passive consists of two variants, the bli-passive (1 b) and the vara-passive (1 c), and since this study is concerned with how the passives are used, I will — for the sake of simplicity — treat them as three different types. Two – or three – ways of expressing passives may seem redundant, but according to several studies there is (not unexpectedly) a certain distribution between the types (Laanemets 2004, 2012; Engdahl 1999, 2001, 2006; the large Swedish descriptive grammar Svenska Akademiens Grammatik 1999 [henceforth SAG]).

The passive can be described as a very general construction (cf. Fried & Östman 2004). In a language such as Swedish, where different types of passives exist, there must be several general passive constructions. The passive constructions share most of the same characteristics, but they also differ from each other to some extent. The different general passive constructions interact with the lexical constructions of the verbs that merge with them. In this interaction we can find patterns of different generality as well as constructions with certain slots filled; Stefanowitsch & Gries (2003, 2004) call these collostructions.

The Swedish passive has been studied quite thoroughly. Recent studies include Laanemets (2004, 2012), Engdahl (2001, 2006) and Lyngfelt (2011). In this paper I will approach the syntactic construction(s) from a lexicological point of view and look at how different verbs interact with general passive constructions. The study is corpus-based and represents a bottom-up approach (Boas 2008) to the Swedish passives. By looking at concrete instances I confront Construction Grammar with the large variety of actual use. By extracting patterns out of the variety, I can say something about constructions of different generality, not only about the more general constructions but also about those that do not fit into neat general patterns.

In the next section I introduce the three types of passive in Swedish. I then present some aspects of Construction Grammar that are relevant for this study. After that I turn to my corpus material. The empirical corpus study presents the most frequent verbs for each type of passive and
The other variant of the periphrastic passive, the Table 2.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Frequentative</th>
<th>Perfective</th>
<th>Presentive</th>
<th>Infinitive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pluperfect</td>
<td>hade byggs</td>
<td>bygg-d/-d/-da</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>had been built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>har varit</td>
<td>bygg-d/-d/-da</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>has been built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preterite</td>
<td>var</td>
<td>bygg-d/-d/-da</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>was built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>är</td>
<td>bygg-d/-d/-da</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>is built</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infinitive</td>
<td>vara</td>
<td>bygg-d/-d/-da</td>
<td>built</td>
<td>be built</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. The vara-passive forms of the verb bygga ‘build’

The correspondences between the tenses of the vara-passive and the other two passives depend on the telicity of the verb. For telic verbs the present form corresponds to the perfect form of the s-passive (2 a), and for atelic verbs it corresponds to the present form (2 b) (SAG 4: 393–395).

(2)  
a) är bygg-d/-t/-da har byggt is built/has been built  
b) är ålska-d/-t/-de ålks is loved/is being loved

The vara-passive can be used for expressing certain time relations that cannot be expressed with the other passives (3) (Sundman 1987: 423–426, SAG 4: 393–397).

(3)   
Bro-n borde ha varit bridge-DEF should have be-SUP  
byggt för länge sedan build-PCP-UTR long ago

‘the bridge should have been built long ago’

The English translation of (3) corresponds equally well to the s- and bli-passives (borde ha byggt; borde ha blivit byggd). The topic for the latter alternatives is the building process, whereas (3) emphasizes that there should be a bridge already, that a bridge has been planned. For further information on time relations see e.g. Sundman (1987), SAG (4: 393–397).

After this brief presentation of the formal aspect I will turn to the distribution of the forms in use by referring to earlier studies.

2.2. The Swedish passives in use

Tables 1 and 2 in section 2.1 may give the impression that the s- and bli-passives are mutually interchangeable; SAG (4: 382) actually says, that there is a high conformance syntactically and semantically between the two forms, whereas the use of the vara-passive is much more limited. This is not true, however, when it comes to actual usage, and as a matter of fact SAG itself illuminates the differences later in its descriptions (SAG 4: 397–401).
The s-passive shows a much higher frequency than the bli-passive in authentic material, but in fact the vara-passive is also more common than the bli-passive. According to Laanemets (2004: 91), the proportion between the three types (in a sample of 562 sentences from newspaper articles from 2003) is 91.3% for the s-passive, 1.2% for the bli-passive and 7.1% for the vara-passive. A comparison of different genres in larger corpora renders about the same figures for newspaper texts but a higher (but in no way high) proportion of bli-passive for other genres (Laanemets 2012: 92). This is shown in Table 4. The vara-passive was not accounted for in that study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>s-passive</th>
<th>bli-passive</th>
<th>vara-passive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written</td>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>90.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoken</td>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>93.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. The distribution of the s- and bli-passive in different genres according to Laanemets (2012)

From the quantitative distribution we turn to the functional side. Although there is much to be said on the topic a summary of the main points is presented here. Further and more detailed descriptions can be found in the literature that this short description is based on (Engdahl 1999, 2000, 2006; Laanemets 2012: 359–404; Sundman 1987).

- The s-passive is the unmarked passive in Swedish.
- The bli-passive cannot be used in general statements, instructions, rules and so on.
- There are syntactic restrictions to the bli-passive. It cannot be used in raising constructions and impersonal passives.
- Earlier it was assumed that the choice between the s- and bli-passive is a matter of emphasizing either the action or the result. Aktionsart also plays a role, but it seems to be a matter of animacy and control: verbs that have a high frequency of animate object in active form show a higher tendency for the bli-passive, even if the s-passive is also dominant for them.
- For polysemous verbs, there are often connections between meaning and preferred passive form.
- The s-passive occurs with verbs that are frequent and have a wide and general meaning, whereas verbs in the bli-passive have a concrete meaning (Laanemets 2012: 194)
- Such tendencies exist, but the patterns are not quite as clear as has been claimed in syntactic literature (Laanemets 2012)

The vara-passive is formed with the help of the static copula vara ‘be’ and the focus is on the state that is the result of a verb action. Past participles of telic verbs have a high tendency for adjectivization (Sundman 1987: 417–419).

3. Theoretical assumptions

Constructions are pairings of form and meaning. For very general syntactical constructions the notion meaning is slightly problematic; in fact Goldberg (2006: 3) for example, uses function instead: “conventionalized pairings of form and function”.

The passive construction can be described as a very general construction. The semantic function of the construction is to express that an entity is affected by a potentially undefined cause, while pragmatically it expresses the discourse prominence of the result of an action (Fried & Östman 2004: 49).

If the semantic and pragmatic functions for all three Swedish passives were the same they could be described as in (4) (following the type of notation used in Lyngfelt (2007:119)). The short form Pcp is used for Past participle, since the other Swedish participle, the present participle, does not come into question in a discussion of the passive.

(4)

(a) S-PASSIVE
  [Pat/Exp V (Agent)]
  <Subj V-s (PPav)>  
  [Sem Pass]  
  [Prag Pass]

(b) Blı-PASSIVE
  [Pat/Exp V (Agent)]
  <Subj Auxblı V-Pcp (PPav)>  
  [Sem Pass]
  [Prag Pass]

(c) Vara-PASSIVE
  [Pat/Exp V (Agent)]
  <Subj Auxvara V-Pcp (PPav)>  
  [Sem Pass]
  [Prag Pass]

However, the previous section (2.2) stated that the s-passive is the general passive for Swedish, whereas the bli-passive is submitted to several restrictions. The Sem-part in (4 b) must be specified, as, for example [Sem Pass no-general utterances, Pat/Exp Animate].

Earlier studies have shown that different meanings of a verb tend to be connected to different passive alternatives (cf. section 2.2). In a study of argument structure Boas (2003) introduces the concept mini-construction. Verbs with multiple meanings can be split up in lexical mini-constructions. Each mini-construction is a conventional pair of a form with a meaning, and it entails syntactical information on how the frame elements may be realized syntactically.

Croft (2003) and Barddal (2011) question the dichotomy between lexical rules and syntactic constructions and assume patterns of different generality. Boas (2008) also points out the importance of the lexicon-syntax continuum. Boas (2008) discusses how Construction Grammar is supposed to handle the interactions between lexical
entries and grammatical constructions and states that further research should be done with a corpus-based bottom-up approach. This study is a small step in that direction.

Stefanowitsch & Gries (2003, 2004) have introduced the concept collocations for collocations consisting of structural patterns with certain slots filled. An example of a collocation is the into-causative where the causative verb can vary (for example trick, fool, force). An instance of the construction is: He tricked me into employing him.

4. Verbs used frequently in passive voice – corpus survey

This study of Swedish passives has a quantitative approach. It presents verbs that appear frequently in the passive voice and shows that verbs have a strong tendency for certain passive forms. Only a few verbs appear frequently in more than one passive.

4.1. Verbs used in s-passive

As established above (section 2.2), the s-passive is the dominant type of passive in Swedish. A list that simply shows verbs with a high frequency of the s-passive does not necessarily show which verbs typically appear in the s-passive, since verbs with an overall high frequency tend to emerge on such a list. An example is the verb göra ‘do, make’, with an s-passive frequency of 137.6 per 1 million words. If the share of s-forms of all the forms of the verb is calculated it turns out to be only 5.2 %, i.e. göra is not a verb that is typically used in the s-passive.

Table 5 shows a list of verbs with the highest share of s-forms. The criteria for the list are a high frequency in the passive (over 1000 hits in the corpus used, i.e. a relative frequency of over 24 hits per one million words). Moreover the share of s-passive forms should be over 40 % of all forms of the verbs. These criteria are filled by eight verbs.

In Table 5, verbs representing so-called deponent verbs (verbs ending in -s without being passive forms) have been excluded (cf. SAG 4: 401–403, SAG 2:554–557, Lyngfelt 2007, 2010).

4.2. Verbs used in periphrastic passive

Extracting periphrastic passive forms from the corpus is more complicated than extracting s-passives. Grammatical tagging has been done for participles in the corpus but not for periphrastic passive forms, so I have searched for the different forms of the two auxiliary verbs bli ‘become’ and vara ‘be’, respectively, in combination with past participles (common gender, neuter, plural), allowing up to four elements between the auxiliary and the participle.

The past participle can, like in English, be used adjectivally (e.g. interesserad ‘interested’). With the help of the coding done for the participle lexemes in the corpus I have excluded all the participles that are coded as adjectival or as both adjectival and verbal, since purely verbal uses are of interest here. The result is lists of verbs used frequently in the bli-passive (Table 6) and vara-passive (Table 7).
Table 7. Participles that can be either verbal or adjectival.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Eng. translation</th>
<th>bli PCP</th>
<th>bli [0-4] PCP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>skjuta</td>
<td>shoot</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kalla</td>
<td>call, name; send for</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skada</td>
<td>injure, damage</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>miss-handla</td>
<td>assault</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mördla</td>
<td>murder</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kör på</td>
<td>run over</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lura</td>
<td>cheat</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erbjuda</td>
<td>offer</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>döda</td>
<td>kill</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>819</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Verbs used frequently in the vara-passive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Eng. translation</th>
<th>vara PCP</th>
<th>vara [0-4] PCP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gora</td>
<td>do; make</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>1401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanka</td>
<td>think</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>1029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skriva</td>
<td>write</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avse</td>
<td>intend; concern</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>försvinna</td>
<td>vanish</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skada</td>
<td>injure, damage</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hämta</td>
<td>fetch</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>planera</td>
<td>plan</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bygga</td>
<td>build</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>döma</td>
<td>judge</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Verbs used in all three passives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Eng. translation</th>
<th>Ordinal No. (1-6&amp;7)</th>
<th>Type of periph. pass</th>
<th>% passive freq.</th>
<th>% passive share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>döma</td>
<td>judge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>vara</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skada</td>
<td>injure, damage</td>
<td>4, 6</td>
<td>bli, vara</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>döda</td>
<td>kill</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>bli</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kalla</td>
<td>call, name; send for</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>bli</td>
<td>103.5</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erbjuda</td>
<td>offer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>bli</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bygga</td>
<td>build</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>vara</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skjuta</td>
<td>shoot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>vara</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skriva</td>
<td>write</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>vara</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>göra</td>
<td>do; make</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>vara</td>
<td>137.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se</td>
<td>see</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>bli</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Verbs occurring frequently in more than one of the passive forms (out of top 30).
Although these comparisons show that the verbs are strongly differentiated as to which passive they prefer, the result concerns frequent use. Most of the verbs are also used in the other passives as well as in the one they prefer. Laanemets (2012) has also shown that the passive patterns are not quite as clear as has been claimed in syntactic literature.

5. S-passive patterns
In this section I will look more closely at some of the verbs with a high share of s-passive forms to see what kind of patterns they seem to be part of.

5.1. Distribution of the paradigm forms of the s-passive
Laanemets (2012) has examined the overall distribution of the different tense forms of the s-passive in written (newspaper) language. In Table 10 the absolute numbers given by Laanemets (2012) have been turned into percentage numbers and the proportion of tense forms is compared to the overall proportion for the top-eight s-passive verbs of my study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Preterite</th>
<th>Supine</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laanem. (2012)</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The top-8 s-verbs</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. The overall proportion of tenses for eight verbs in comparison with Laanemets’ (2012) numbers.

As we can see, there is a good correlation between Laanemets’ numbers and the overall numbers for the verbs in my study. The greatest deviation is in the supine.

However, when we turn to the distribution of tense forms for individual verbs we can, not unexpectedly, establish that there are clear deviations from the average. The proportions for the different verbs are shown in Table 11. The most striking example is beräkna ‘estimate’ with almost 90 % of the s-forms in the present tense and a very low share of infinitive and supine forms. We can assume that there are different reasons for the different patterns. In a thorough description of the language these differences should be accounted for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Preterite</th>
<th>Supine</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>behandla</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beräkna</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drabba</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>döma</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ersätta</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gripa</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>införa</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tvinga</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. The proportion of tenses per verb in the s-passive.

The verbs tvinga ‘force’ and beräkna ‘estimate’ differ from the other verbs by having a strong tendency to appear in the structure V-s + V-inf. In the next section we shall take a closer look at them.

5.2. The verb beräkna
Two of the top-eight verbs in the corpus, tvinga ‘force’ and beräkna ‘estimate’, have a strong tendency to appear in the structure V-s + V-inf as in (5) and (6). The latter (6) represents the Subject Raising Construction discussed by e.g. Lyngfelt (2011).

(5) Han tvinga-de-s komma he force-PRET-PASS come-INF
    ‘he was forced to come’

(6) De beräkna-a-s kunna they estimate-PRES-PASS can-INF
    komma först om några dagar. come-INF first in a few days
    ‘presumably they will not be able to come for several days’

In the passive use 78 % of the instances of the verb tvinga are of the type tvingas + V-INF without the infinitive marker att ‘to’, whereas 13 % have an att, tvingas + att + V.INF.

In the active voice tvinga is normally connected to another verb with the infinitive marker att ‘to’ as connector (7). Over 80 % of 103 random hits are of this type and only two are hits without an att.

(7) De tvinga-de honom att komma they force-PRET-ACThe-OBJ to come-INF
    ‘they forced him to come’

The infinitive marker att is optional both in the active and passive voice but there is a marked difference in the tendency of the att to appear.

For the verb beräkna ‘estimate’, 71 % of all passive instances (of a sample of 117) represent the structure V-s V-INF as in (6) above.

There are only two occurrences in the active voice where the infinitive lacks the att (of a sample of 148). Six have an att (8). In 80 % of all occurrences beräkna is a single main verb, in 45 % it
has an NP as object, in 36% it governs a subordinate clause with att ‘that’, and in 8% it governs other subordinate clauses.

(8) GN AB beräknar att
GN Inc. estimate-PRES-Act to-INF.M.
om en vecka lämna
in a week hand-INF
in sin ansökan
in-particle their-refl application
‘GN Inc. estimate that they will be able to hand their application in a week’

The two verbs tvingas and beräkna show considerable differences in how they combine with other verbs and with the marker att in the active and passive. In the passive they behave somewhat like auxiliary verbs. The question is whether statistical tendencies ought to be included in the descriptions of constructions. That would be complicated, though, since the figures would not be stable. Different genres, for example, may give different statistical results.

Engdahl (1999) mentions that control verbs such as tvinga ‘force’ can be used both in the s- and bli-passive even if the s-passive is much more common. Raising verbs such as anse ‘consider’ and anta ‘assume’ can only be used in the s-passive. The verb beräkna ‘estimate’ belongs to the latter group. In Lyngfelt (2011) the Subject Raising Construction and related constructions are discussed thoroughly, and beräkna is one of the verbs mentioned. I shall not go further into the topic, but I want to point out the problem of description again. To which construction does that type of information belong: the general passives, the Raising Construction and the like, or to the lexical constructions for the verb?

5.3. Occurrence of the av-phrase (agent-PP)

One of the characteristics of the passive construction is the optional Agent expressed through a PP. In Swedish the agent preposition is av. The top-eight verbs of s-passives in my material show considerable differences in the tendency to take an agent-PP. Table 12 presents three verbs, drabba ‘strike; afflict’, gripa ‘seize; move’ and ersätta ‘compensate; replace’, that stand out. The table shows the numbers for hits where the preposition stands next to the verb (beräknas av, drabbas av etc.). A search allowing up to five elements between the verb and the preposition av and with the dependency relation for the PP defined as Agent gives a very similar pattern even if the percentage figures for the top three items are somewhat lower. The av-phrase does not always, however, express Agent but rather Cause. (I will not go into a discussion of how to handle semantic roles in metaphoric sentences; I consider intentional actors as Agent in this study.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Swedish verb</th>
<th>English translation</th>
<th>Absolute frequency</th>
<th>% with av</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beräknas</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td>1204</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drabbas</td>
<td>strike; afflict</td>
<td>3295</td>
<td>1746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tvingas</td>
<td>force</td>
<td>5497</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gripas</td>
<td>seize; move</td>
<td>2494</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>införas</td>
<td>introduce, insert</td>
<td>1136</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dömas</td>
<td>judge; sentence</td>
<td>1670</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behandlas</td>
<td>treat; handle</td>
<td>1156</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ersätta</td>
<td>compensate; replace</td>
<td>1015</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12. The frequency of av- phrases in combination with s-verbs

For drabba the semantic role of the av-adverbial is Cause, not Agent, and the most common causes are diseases and injuries of all kinds. Damages and accidents are also frequent. The Patient, that is, the subject of the clause, is mostly animate and human but there are some examples of inanimate Patients such as in (9).

(9) Land-et har drabba-t-s
   country-DEF have-SG-PRES affect-SUP-PASS
   av torka
   by drought
   ‘the country suffers from drought’

For gripa the most common subpattern is gripas av polis(en) ‘be seized by (the) police’. Alongside polis other authority-like groups occur in the Agent role rather frequently. Another subpattern is gripas av panik/ängest ‘be struck by/ get into panic/anxiety’ where the verb is used metaphorically and where the semantic role of the av-adverbial is Cause. Also, other strong feelings, both negative and positive, can be expressed with the av-adverbial.

For the verb ersätta no obvious lexical subpatterns can be found. Three main semantic patterns appear in a random selection of 100 hits: 1) a Receiver is compensated by a Payer (for a damage), 2) a human Patient is replaced by a human Agent and 3) an inanimate Patient is used instead of another inanimate Patient (by an Agent not expressed).

The patterns that can be observed for the three verbs are connected to the world around us, so in that respect the combinations are not arbitrary. Still, there is a great deal of arbitrariness involved in the expressions. This is clear if we consider that the verbs have several equivalents in English. Even if the grammar allows several possibilities of expressing a certain idea we tend to prefer one way over the others (Pawley 1986).

Out of the eight verbs that show the greatest proportion of passive forms in all forms of the verb, only three show a high tendency for the av-adverbial; and the av-adverbial expresses Cause more often than Agent. Av-less passive sentences are
most typical for the Swedish s-passive. In a constructional description of these verbs the tendency for an av-phrase should be accounted for as well as whether the PP tends to represents Agent or Cause.

After these glances at s-passive uses we turn to the periphrastic passives.

6. Patterns for the periphrastic passive
Section 4.2 pointed out the verbs that show the highest frequency of periphrastic passives in the corpus. This section takes a closer look at some of these verbs.

6.1. Bli-passive patterns
Most of the verbs in the bli-passive top list (Table 6 in section 4.2) demonstrate that there is reason to state that verbs fusing with the bli-passive construction are telic (section 2.2). The action referred to by some of the verbs can even be said to lead to drastic results (skjuta ‘shoot’, mörda ‘murder’, döda ‘kill’ and so on).

Three of the ten verbs are, however, not clearly telic (se ‘see’, kalla ‘call, name; send for’, erbjuda ‘offer’) and we shall have a look at the three exceptions to see why they appear in the bli-passive.

With se ‘see' the bli-passive is strongly connected with two different meanings. One is the meaning ‘observer’ (10), the other is the meaning ‘note’ as the opposite to ‘ignore’ (11). In the latter meaning the s-passive can hardly be used. There are also some occurrences of the bli-passive form followed by the word som ‘as’ with the meaning ‘be seen as, be considered’.

(10) en tiger hade blivit sedd
a tiger had been se-PCP-UTR
ute på Ingarö.
on out Ingarö
’a tiger had been seen on
(the island of) Ingarö’

(11) Alla vill bli älskade
All-PL want be-INF love-PCP-PL
och sedda
and see-PCP-PL
’everybody wants to be loved and seen’

The bli-passive, bli kallad, can mainly be used in two different meanings of the verb kalla, ’call, name' and ’call for, send for’; in the latter meaning it is often used in combination with the preposition till ’to’. Both meanings appear also for kalla in the s-passive.

In the meaning ’call, name' the bli-passive is chiefly used with nouns, to a great extent with nouns with negative connotations, as for example (in translation) be called a whore, faggot, bandit, animal abuser and so on). The s-passive, too, is frequently combined with nouns, but with neutral nouns (kallas tant ’be called auntie’); however, it also appears with adjectives (kallas demokratisk ’be called democratic’). The tendency of the bli-passive to combine with negative nouns is probably a consequence of its more casual style level.

For the ’send for' meaning of kalla, no obvious differences in use can be observed between the s- and bli-passive in the part of the corpus that consists of literature. The occurrences mostly refer to personal calls. The newspaper material shows a clear difference: the bli-passive is used chiefly for persons getting a personal call, whereas the s-passive often has the nuance of 'alarm'. Police, ambulance, fire department and so on are the subject for kallas till, although examples with persons called for occur as well. Kallas till möte (’meeting’), kallas till förhör (’inquiry; examination’) and particularly kallas till platsen (’the place’) are frequent combinations. There is not a single occurrence of bli kallad till platsen.

The passives of the verb erbjuda ’offer' are strongly connected to the newspaper genre. For the s-passive, 808 hits of 867, or 95 %, occur in the press material. The difference for the bli-passive is not as marked but even so, the share is 81 % (99 of 122). (The proportion of corpus texts is 68 % newspaper and 32 % literature.) The bli-passive is clearly personal with personal pronouns and names as frequent subjects.

A constructional description of these phenomena can partly be explained through the concept of mini-constructions (Boas 2003, 2008), but other factors influencing the choice of construction seem to be text type and genre.

6.2. Vara-passive patterns
Both telic and atelic verbs top the list for the vara-passive (Table 7 in section 4.2). The verb göra (’do; make’) is a highly frequent verb on the whole and can be assumed to be on the list for that reason.

In comparison with the bli-list, several of the verbs of the vara-list seem to express less drastic actions and, above all, the state that the action leads to has actuality for a longer period of time: with bygga ‘build’, skriva ‘write’ and planera ‘plan’ some kind of product remains. As to the verb försvinna ‘disappear’, lost items or missing people have the state of absence as long as they are not found.

Three verbs on the vara-list, tänka ‘think; avsö ’mean, intend’; and hämta ‘fetch’, seem to appear on the list because of their tendency to form collocational patterns. I shall illustrate this with the verb tänka.

The verb tänka ’think’ appears in the vara-passive in certain functions forming collocational patterns such as <X vara tänkt att V-inf> ’X be intended to V-inf’ (12), <X vara tänkt som Y > ’X be thought as a Y’. The first is a raising variant of an extraposition construction <det vara tänkt att Clause> ’it be thought that Clause’ > (13).
In the former sections we looked at periphrastic passives for a couple of verbs and also compared their use in the s-passive. In this last empirical section we turn to verbs that appear rather frequently in all three passives.

### 7. Alternation between all three passives

In the former sections we looked at periphrastic passives for a couple of verbs and also compared their use in the s-passive. In this last empirical section we turn to verbs that appear rather frequently in all three passives.

Engdahl (2001) points out that the choice between the bli- and s-passive is often connected to different meanings. For both döma ‘judge, sentence’ and skada ‘injure, damage’ the large contemporary Swedish dictionary Svensk ordbok (SO 2009) gives only one main meaning, but a comparison with English suggests that meaning plays a role: the nuances of meaning must partly be explained with separate equivalents (17).

(17) **döma**

- **Main meaning**: pass sentence (in court)
- **Nuance**: more general: decide (judge in a competition)
- **Nuance**: tone of blaming (e.g. don’t judge me to hard)

**skada**

- **Main meaning**: injure bodily
- **Nuance**: within sports
- **Nuance**: with respect of other phenomena (damage)
- **Nuance**: In certain expressions (there is no harm in asking …)

However, multiple meanings of the verb are not the only reason for the choice of one of the passives. Several other factors are involved. I will illustrate this with the verb skada. For the comparison I have chosen about 100 random occurrences of each of the three passives.

In terms of what the subject of the passive clause (the Patient) refers to, there is a difference between the forms. As expected (cf. section 2.2.), the bli-passive shows a greater proportion of human subjects than the s-passive, even if the difference is not sizeable. The bli-passive is used to refer to non-humans in 17 % of the occurrences (Table 13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Human</th>
<th>Non-human</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>skadas</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bli skadad</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vara skadad</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13. The distribution between human and non-human subjects

Whereas the subject of the s-passive typically refers to indefinite persons (over 70 %), the subject of the other passives and of the reflexive skada sig ‘hurt oneself’ refers to definite persons in more than 50 % of the cases (for the vara-passive even 80 %). In the comparison, persons mentioned by name, referred to in definite form (mann-en ‘the man’) or by a personal pronoun (han ‘he’, jag ‘I’ and so on) are regarded as known. Table 14 shows the share of known or definite subjects.
expressing Cause.

Among the living creatures the most Agent with an explicit quotations from what somebody has said. About a third can be identified as constructions of different generality interact and where different parts of a description of the use of the Swedish passives belong. The different meanings of a verb as a factor behind the choice between the passives would naturally belong to a description of the lexical constructions of the verb, to the mini-construction (Boas 2003, 2008). But as we have seen, the choice is not only a function of meaning: genre, text type, frame and presumably also regional factors have an influence. Does the information of, for instance, genre belong to the lexical construction or to the general passive constructions that the verb fuses with, or to an even higher level of generality?

There is a general tendency for how the s-passive is preferred to the periphrastic passive but this varies according to genre (cf. Laanemets 2004, 2012). As seen in this study, it varies also for different verbs, and moreover, for the same verb in different genres. Capturing all this variation seems next to impossible for any description.

A third question which arises, the question that was the springboard for this study, is how constructions of different generality interact and where different parts of a description of the use of the Swedish passives belong. The different meanings of a verb as a factor behind the choice between the passives would naturally belong to a description of the lexical constructions of the verb, to the mini-construction (Boas 2003, 2008). But as we have seen, the choice is not only a function of meaning: genre, text type, frame and presumably also regional factors have an influence. Does the information of, for instance, genre belong to the lexical construction or to the general passive constructions that the verb fuses with, or to an even higher level of generality?

The s-passive of skada has 10 occurrences with an explicit av-PP. They all express Cause, not Agent. The most Agent-like adverbial is av rättor och ohyra (‘by rats and vermin’), which refers to living creatures but not to an intentional Damager. Among the bli-passive examples there are five and for vara-passive two occurrences of av-PP, all expressing Cause.

There is more to be said on the passives of skada but I will not go into more detail, because I think my point is clear. There are no sharp rules for how the different passive constructions unify with the lexical construction(s). The concept of mini-construction can be applied – different meanings of the verb fuse with different passives – but this is not always true. The context or frame plays a part (for skada the frame of [sports] for example). The passive is a construction strongly connected to information structure. In Swedish the dimension known–unknown seems to contribute to the choice between different passives.

8. Conclusions and discussion

So, what are the results of this analysis of Swedish verbs used in the passive? Seen from the perspective of a group of individual verbs the distribution of passives seems rather disparate. Even if the s-passive is the unmarked passive in Swedish this does not mean it can always be used. The choice of passive also depends on the genre, the degree of formality/casuality and on the semantic frame (in the meaning of scene or situation as presented in Fillmore (1982)). Patterns can be extracted but the patterns are tendencies, not “rules”. There are also collocational restrictions: a certain passive belongs to a certain collocation (e.g. det är inte lätt att vara lätt ‘it is not meant to be easy’).

This raises the question of whether statistical data should be included in the description of the passive use. Such a solution would be all but simple. There is, for instance, a general tendency for how the s-passive is preferred to the periphrastic passive but this varies according to genre (cf. Laanemets 2004, 2012). As seen in this study, it varies also for different verbs, and moreover, for the same verb in different genres. Capturing all this variation seems next to impossible for any description.

Table 14. The share of known subjects for the passive forms of skada and the reflexive skada sig.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Def. noun</th>
<th>Pers. pron.</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skadas</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bli skadad</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vara skadad</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skada sig</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15. The share of occurrences belonging to the frame [sports].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Sport (N)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>skadas</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bli skadad</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vara skadad</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skada sig</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vara-passive and the reflexive are the forms used in the framework of sports, but even so more than half of the occurrences are non-sport examples.

Of the 85 definable examples of bli-passive of skada not belonging to the sports frame, 18 have non-human and 67 human subjects. Non-human subjects refer to animals, plants, buildings or parts of buildings, vehicles and, last but not least, human parts (eye, hand, molar, nail). Engdahl (2006) has established that almost 90 % of the grammatical subjects of the bli-passive are animate. For the non-sport meaning of skada the share is 84 % if the four hits with animal subjects are included. It can be noted that the boundary between animate and non-animate subjects for skada is connected to an equivalent shift in English, ‘injure’ vs. ‘damage’.

Out of the 67 occurrences with human subjects, 31 represent known subjects and 36 indefinite. About a third can be identified as quotations from what somebody has said.

The s-passive of skada has 10 occurrences with an explicit av-PP. They all express Cause, not Agent. The most Agent-like adverbial is av rättor och ohyra (‘by rats and vermin’), which refers to living creatures but not to an intentional Damager. Among the bli-passive examples there are five and for vara-passive two occurrences of av-PP, all expressing Cause.

In my study I present more questions than I give answers for. For me, with a background in lexicography, Construction Grammar is an appealing theory since it takes meaning into account; but the
ambition to describe “everything” through the same formality and to include all phenomena between syntax and lexicon is a great challenge.

References


Corpus


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