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Passive to anticausative through impersonalization

The case of Vedic and Indo-European

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Vedic Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages attest a typologically remarkable change of passives to anticausatives. This semantic development is attested, foremost, for passives of several verbs of perception and knowledge (knowledge transfer) obviously, according to the scenario ‘Y is seen (known etc.) by smb.’ → ‘Y is seen (known etc.) [by smb.]’ → ‘Y is seen (known etc.) [by generic passive agent]’ → ‘Y is visible (famous, etc.)’. A special variety of this development is instantiated by the passive of a verb of speech, *ucyáte* ‘Y is pronounced’ → ‘Y [e.g. speech, musical instrument] sounds’. In addition, passive to anticausative transfer is attested for a small subgroup of verbs of caused motion. While in this latter case the rise of anticausative usages may be due to conceptualizing simple transitives as causatives (*throw* = ‘make fall, make fly’, etc.), in cases of verbs of perception and knowledge we observe the rise of the anticausative usages through the stage which is called ‘impersonalization’ in Siewierska 1984 and explained in terms of ‘objectivization of knowledge’, i.e. knowledge without a knowing subject. In connection with these verbs, I will briefly discuss the relationships between ‘agentless’, ‘impersonalized’ and ‘impersonal’ passives.

Keywords: passive; anticausative; impersonalization; impersonal passive; verbs of perception; objectivization; Vedic; Indo-European

1. Between passives and anticausatives: Introductory remarks

1.1 Preliminaries and definitions

The distinction between (agentless) passives and non-passive intransitives (foremost, anticausatives) is one of the most tricky issues with which a linguist may be confronted

when undertaking a syntactic study of the verb. On the border between these two categories, we find a large ‘grey zone’ where languages exhibit amazing versatility in the ways of conceptualizing events. Before entering into a discussion of this dichotomy, it will be helpful to give definitions of the basic terms and syntactic notions.

In what follows, I will be dealing with a number of voices and voice-related categories using the powerful theoretical framework developed by the Leningrad/St. Petersburg Typology Group. In accordance with this approach, voices are determined as grammaticalized diatheses, that is, patterns of mapping of semantic roles (or, rather, macroroles, designated with X = Actor and Y = Undergoer) onto syntactic functions, or grammatical relations (Subject [S], Direct Object [DO], Indirect Object [IO], Oblique Object [Obl]).¹

Thus, the canonical (‘full’) passive construction (diathesis) based on a simple transitive verb suggests the demotion of the initial subject of the base construction and the concomitant promotion of the direct object to the subject position, as schematized in (1) and illustrated in (2b):

- (1) Passive
- | | | | | |
|---|----|---|-----|---|
| X | Y | ⇒ | X | Y |
| S | DO | | Obl | S |
- (2) Latin
- a. *Miles hostem occidit*
warrior:NOM enemy:ACC kill:PRES:3SG
‘The warrior kills the enemy.’
- b. *A milite hostis occidi-tur*
by warrior:ABL enemy:NOM kill:PRES-3SG.PASS
‘The enemy is (being) killed by the warrior.’
- c. *Hostis occidi-tur*
enemy:NOM kill:PRES-3SG.PASS
‘The enemy is (being) killed.’

The much more common agentless passive pattern (sometimes also called ‘reduced passive’; see e.g. Matthews 1997:311) differs in that the agent noun is removed from the structure, as shown in (3 and 2c):

- (3) Agentless passive
- | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|
| X | Y | ⇒ | X | Y |
| S | DO | | – | S |

1. For a detailed description of this apparatus, see, for instance, Geniušienė (1987); Mel’čuk (1993); Kulikov (2011).

Obviously, this pattern is very similar to the anticausative (decausative) derivation, schematized in (4) and illustrated in (5b):²

(4) Anticausative

X	Y	$\Rightarrow$		Y
S	DO		-	S

Both anticausative and agentless passive derivations entail the promotion of the initial Direct Object (Patient) and the demotion (de-focusing) of the Agent. This functional similarity of the two categories, repeatedly mentioned in the typological literature (see, among others, Comrie 1985:328ff.; Haspelmath 1987:29ff.; Shibatani 1985; Myhill 1997), accounts for their similar morphological marking in many languages. Some languages, nevertheless, make a morphological distinction between these two categories, cf. (5b–c) in Russian:

(5) Russian

- a. *Petr* *sloma-l-Ø* *derevo*
 Peter:NOM broke-PAST-SG.M tree:ACC
 ‘Peter broke the tree.’
- b. *Derevo* *sloma-l-o-s’* (**Petrom*)
 tree:NOM broke-PAST-SG.N-REFL (Peter:INS)
 ‘The tree broke (*by Peter).’
- c. *Derevo* *by-l-o* *sloma-n-o* (*Petrom*)
 tree:NOM be-PAST-SG.N broke-PART.PERF.PASS-SG.N (Peter:INS)
 ‘The tree was broken (by Peter).’

1.2 Agentless passive vs. anticausative: Semantic distinction and its conceptual basis

Apparently, the only difference between (3) and (4) resides in the fact that the agentless passive, while leaving the Agent (Actor) overtly unexpressed, preserves it in the semantic structure, whereas the anticausative entirely removes the Agent from the inventory of semantic roles. In cases where the markers of the passive and anticausative overlap, passives without an overtly expressed Agent can be distinguished from anticausatives only semantically. The standard formulation of this semantic dichotomy is as follows: ‘Passive and anticausative differ in that, even where the former has no agentive

2. Terms used to refer to this category include, in particular, ‘inchoative’ (a rather confusing term, widely used after Haspelmath (1993)), ‘unaccusative’, ‘ergative (intransitive)’, ‘quasi-passive’, ‘middle passive’, ‘pseudo-passive’ (see Shibatani 1985), ‘fientive’ (now common in the Indo-European scholarship); see Kulikov (2001a: 888) for a survey.

phrase, the existence of some person or thing bringing about the situation is implied, whereas the anticausative is consistent with the situation coming about spontaneously” (Comrie 1985: 326). However, this definition oversimplifies the real picture. The use of the anticausative morphology implies conceptualizing the corresponding event as spontaneous, even in cases where the presence of an external agent is possible, and even quite probable. Thus, the sentence *The door is being opened* strongly imposes the existence of someone opening the door. By contrast, when uttering the sentence *The door is opening*, we present the event as coming about spontaneously, even though in the majority of cases, an agent (someone who is opening the door) would be involved. In other words, the Agent, even if possible, is considered much more irrelevant than in the case of agentless passives – so irrelevant that the corresponding verbs (*The door is opening*, *The chair is breaking* [**by Peter*], etc.) are grouped together with verbs that denote processes which are necessarily spontaneous (*The tomato is rotting*, *The tree is growing*, etc.).

The affinity between these two categories is reflected in their historical connections. The grammaticalization path from non-passive derived intransitives (in particular, from reflexives or anticausatives) to passives is indeed well-known and has been repeatedly discussed in the typological literature; see, e.g., Haspelmath (1990); Heine & Kuteva (2002: 252f).

Much less studied is the opposite transition, from passives to non-passive intransitives (anticausatives). Yet this development is not infrequent – in particular, in a number of Indo-European languages. Importantly, this transition starts with agentless passives³ and suggests a compulsory intermediate stage of impersonalized passive. An unfortunate corollary of the delicate character of the passive/anticausative opposition is the fact that the passive to anticausative transition is only rarely explicitly mentioned in grammars and has not received due attention in the literature on the diachrony of passive, voice and valency-changing categories in general.

A very clear instance of such development is observed, in particular, in Old Indo-Aryan (= Vedic Sanskrit). After a short summary of passive formations in Vedic Sanskrit, which will be given in §2, I will scrutinize the passive to anticausative transition in Vedic (§3). §4 gives a short overview of typological parallels attested in some other Indo-European languages. §5 offers a general description of this development, paying special attention to its epistemic roots. The concluding §6 concentrates on some terminological aspects of the phenomenon in question, in particular, on the distinction between impersonal and impersonalized passives.

3. That is, passives constructed without agents; for definitions, see, for instance, Chalker & Weiner (1994: 17); Matthews (1997).

2. Chronological and grammatical notes on Vedic

Vedic Sanskrit, or Vedic, which can be roughly identified with Old Indo-Aryan, is the earliest attested language of the Indo-Aryan group of the Indo-European language family and one of the most ancient attested Indo-European languages. The language of the most ancient Vedic text, the Ṛgveda (RV), can approximately be dated to the second half of the second millennium BC. The language of the second most ancient text, the Atharvaveda (AV),⁴ resembles in many respects – and is essentially synchronic with – the language of the late RV. Early Vedic (i.e. the language of the RV and AV) is followed by middle and late Vedic (covering the middle of the first millennium BC) documented in the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, the oldest Upaniṣads and Sūtras.

There are several verbal formations in Vedic which can be employed in passive constructions; for details, see Kulikov (2006). In the language of the RV, there are three sets of passive formations, used for the three main tense systems, present, aorist, and perfect. These include:

- i. **present** passives with the accented suffix *-yá-*⁵ (e.g. *yuj* ‘yoke, join’: 3rd person singular form *yujyáte* ‘is (being) yoked, joined’, 3rd person plural form *yujyánte* ‘are (being) yoked, joined’, participle *yujyámāna-* ‘being yoked, joined’, etc.);
- ii. medio-passive **aorists** with a defective paradigm, which includes 3SG. in *-i*, 3PL. in *-ran/-ram*, and participle with the suffix *-āna-* (e.g. *yuj* ‘yoke, join’: 3SG. *áyoji*, 3PL. *ayujran*, part. *yujāná-*); and
- iii. stative, which supplies passives in the system of **perfect** and also has a defective paradigm (3SG. in *-e*, 3PL. in *-re*, and participle with the suffix *-āna-*); statives can be derived either from present stems (e.g. for the root *hi* ‘impel’, from the stem of the class V present *hinó-/hinu-*: 3SG. *hinvé* ‘(it) is/has been impelled’, 3PL. *hinviré* ‘(they) are/have been impelled’, *hinvāná-* ‘impelled’), or from perfect stems, thus being formally identical with middle perfects (cf. for the root *yuj* ‘yoke, join’: 3PL.

4. Abbreviations used for Vedic texts (text sigla) are the following:

AV(ś)	Atharvaveda (Śaunakiya recension)	RV	Rgveda
AVP	Atharvaveda (Paippalāda recension)	śB	Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa
JB	Jaiminiya-Brāhmaṇa	TB	Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa
Kps	Kaṣīṭhala-Kāṭha-Saṃhitā	TS	Taittirīya-Saṃhitā
KS	Kāṭhaka	VS	Vājasaneyi-Saṃhitā

5. Finite verbal forms are normally unaccented except when appearing in a subordinate clause and/or at the beginning of a sentence or metrical unit (pāda), i.e. a verse which forms the minimal constituent of a stanza.

yuyujré ‘(they) are/have been yoked, joined’, *yuyujāná-* ‘yoked, joined’).⁶ By the end of the early Vedic period, the category of stative disappears.

There are also isolated passive occurrences of non-characterized middle forms (i.e. middle forms that have no specific passive morphology).

3. Passive to anticausative transition in early Vedic: Patterns and semantic classes

The passive to anticausative transition is attested for a few compact semantic classes of verbs. These include: (i) verbs of perception and knowledge; (ii) a verb of speech (*vac*); and (iii) a few verbs of caused motion.

3.1 Passives of verbs of perception and knowledge

The non-passive usages of the passives derived from verbs of perception of the type ‘is seen’ → ‘is visible; appears’ represent the commonest instance of passive to anticausative transition, and can probably be found in most languages with passives.

In Vedic, this development is attested for passives of a few verbs such as *dṛśyáte* ‘is seen’ → ‘is visible; appears’ and *śrūyáte* ‘is heard’ → ‘is known, is famous’. In what follows, I will discuss at length the meanings of these passives and the corresponding syntactic patterns.

3.1.1 *dṛś* ‘see’: *dṛśyá-*^{te} etc.

The present *dṛśyá-*^{te} regularly occurs in the agentless passive. In fact, its meaning always wavers between (agentless) passive (‘is seen’, ‘can be seen’) and non-passive (‘appears, is visible’). Cf.:

(6) (AVŚ 7.101.1)

<i>yát</i>	<i>svápne</i>	<i>ánnam</i>	<i>aśnámi</i>	<i>ná</i>	<i>prātár</i>
if	dream:LOC	food:ACC	eat:PRES.1SG.ACT	not	in.the.morning
<i>adhigam-yá-te</i>	<i>sárvam</i>	<i>tád</i>	<i>astu</i>	<i>me</i>	<i>śívam</i>
find-PRES.PASS-3SG	all	that	be:IMPV.3SG	I:DAT	propitious
<i>nahí</i>	<i>tád</i>	<i>dṛś-yá-te</i>	<i>dívā</i>		
for	that	see-PRES.PASS-3SG	by.day		

‘If I eat food in my dream, [and it] is not found in the morning,
be all that propitious to me, for that is not seen by day.’

6. For the category of stative (which only recently has acquired full rights in the synchronic grammar of early Vedic), its paradigm and its status within the verbal system, see Kümmel 1996 and Kulikov 2006.

(7) (AVŚ 10.8.25ab)

bālād ékam aṇiyaskām utá- ékaṃ ná- iva dṛś-ya-te
 child:ABL.SG one more.minute and one not like see-PRES.PASS-3SG
 ‘One [thing] is minuter than a child, and another one is as if it were invisible.’

Note also that the participle *dṛśyamāna-* (and, with the negative prefix, *ádṛśyamāna-*) functions as an adjective, meaning ‘(in)visible’, as in (8):

(8) (ŚB 3.6.2.26)

té ha sma- etá ubháye deva-manuṣyāḥ pitáraḥ
 that:NOM.PL.M PRTCL these both god-man:NOM.PL father:NOM.PL
sám pibante, sá- eṣā sampā; té
 together drink:PRES:3.PL.MED that this symposium that:NOM.PL.M
ha sma dṛś-yá-mānā evá purā sám
 PRTCL see-PRES.PASS-PART:NOM.PL.M formerly together
pibanta, utàitárhy á-dṛś-ya-mānāḥ
 drink:PRES:3.PL.INJ.MED but now not-see-PRES.PASS-PART:NOM.PL.M
 ‘And, verily, these both, the gods and men, [as well as] the fathers used to drink together, that is this symposium; formerly they used to drink together [with us] quite visibly, but now [they do so] invisibly.’⁷

Alongside with (i) present formations with the suffix *-yá-*, other morphological passives attested for the root *dṛś* include: (ii) passive aorists (3SG. *ádarsí* ‘(he/she/it) has been seen; has been visible, has appeared’, 3PL. *ádṛśran/-ram* ‘(they) have been seen, visible etc.’, participles *dṛśāna-* RV^{1x} and *dṛśāná-* RV^{2x}); (iii) the 3PL. form of the sigmatic aorist *adṛkṣata* (which replaces the passive aorist *ádṛśran/-ram* after the RV; see Narten 1964: 146), and (iv) stative (?) 3SG. *dádṛśe/dadṛśe* (traditionally regarded as middle perfects),⁸ as, for instance, in (9):

(9) (RV 8.82.8ab)

yóm apsú candráma iva sómaś
 who:NOM.SG. water:LOC.PL moon:NOM.SG like Soma:NOM.SG
camūṣu dádṛś-e
 camū:LOC.PL see:PERF-3SG.STAT
 ‘Soma, who has appeared in the camū-vessels, like the moon in the waters...’

7. Cf. Delbrück’s (1888:502) translation: “diese beiden, Götter und Menschen sowohl wie Väter, pflegten zusammen zu trinken, das ist die sampā, und zwar tranken diese vormals sichtbar mit, jetzt aber unsichtbar”.

8. See Kümmel (2000:233f.) For the paradigmatic status of these formations, see Kulikov 2006.

3.1.2 śru 'hear': śrūyá-^{te} etc.

Like the verb *ḍṛś*, *śru* attests a very rich and nearly complete passive paradigm, which includes: (i) present passive *śrūyá-^{te}* (attested from the late RV onwards); (ii) passive aorist (3SG. injunctive) *-śrávi* (RV 10.93.14); (iii) statives derived from the present stem *śṛñó-/śṛñu-* (3SG. *śṛñvé*, 2SG. *śṛñviṣé*, 3PL. *śṛñvire*); and (iv) middle perfect (stative derived from perfect stem?) *śuśruve* (RV 8.66.9).

There are two types of usages attested for these formations: (α) an agentless passive usage, typical of the passives of verbs of perception: 'be heard', and (β) a non-passive intransitive (anticausative) usage, which easily develops from (α): 'is heard [by smb.]' → 'is audible' → 'is known' → 'is famous'.

In usage (α), passives are constructed with the subject of sound properly speaking, cf.:

(10) (RV 10.168.4c)

ghóṣā id asya śṛñv-ire ná rūpām
 voice:NOM.PL only his hear:PRES-3PL.STAT not form:NOM.SG
 'Only his (= Vāta's) voices are heard (are audible), not the form.'

The parallel verse in the Atharvaveda (Paippalāda) has a present form instead of the more archaic stative (which virtually disappears from the verbal paradigm after the RV), thus being its secondary replacement:⁹

(11) (AVP 1.107.3c)

ghoṣa id asya śrū-ya-te na rūpām
 voice:NOM.SG only his hear-PRES.PASS-3SG not form:NOM.SG
 'His (= Vāta's) voice is heard, not the form.'

(12) (JB 2.1:4–5)

yām imāṃ śreṣṭhī vāc-aṃ
 which:ACC.SG.F this:ACC.SG.F chairman:NOM.SG speech-ACC.SG
vadati [...] *sā hi dūrāc chrū-ya-te*
 pronounce:PRES:3SG.ACT that:NOM.SG.F indeed from.afar hear-PRES.PASS-3SG
 'The speech which the chairman pronounces [...] is indeed heard from afar.'

(13) (RV 9.41.3ab)

śṛñv-é vṛṣṭér iva svanāḥ
 hear:PRES-3SG.STAT rain:GEN.SG like sound:NOM.SG
pávamānasya śuṣmīṇ-aḥ

9. The Atharvavedic form is qualified by Renou (1947:69, with Footnote 1) as "variante ... linguistiquement « normalisante »" or as "modernisme en face de RV *śṛñvire*" (Renou 1965:40).

Pavamāna:GEN.SG rushing-GEN.SG.M

‘The sound of the rushing Pavamāna is heard, like [that] of the rain.’

Usage (α) is attested only for pres. *śrūyāte* (after the RV) and statives.

In the other usage, (β), passives (*śrūyate*, *śṛṇvire* etc.) are constructed with the subject of a person or an abstract concept (see Cardona 1961: 339ff.; Kümmel 1996: 115ff.), who/which is the source of sound, thus being metonymically associated with the sound and therefore can be said to ‘be heard’/‘be famous’. The only RVic occurrence of pres. *śrūyā-te* belongs to this type:

(14) (RV 10.22.1ab)

kūha śrutā indrah

where heard:NOM.SG.M Indra:NOM

kāsminn adyā jāne mitró ná śrū-ya-te

which:LOC.SG today people:LOC friend:NOM.SG as hear-PRES.PASS-3SG

‘Where is Indra famous? In which community is he known/famous

today as a friend?’

The passive present *śrūyate* becomes more common in later texts, cf.:

(15) (TB^m 2.5.1.3)

śrótṛeṇa bhadram utā śṛṇv-anti satyām [...]

ear:INS.SG good:ACC.SG and hear:PRES-3PL.ACT truth:ACC.SG

śrótṛeṇa módaś ca māhaś ca śrū-ya-te

ear:INS.SG joy:NOM.SG and greatness:NOM.SG and hear-PRES.PASS-3SG

‘With ear they hear good and truth; [...] with ear the joy

and greatness are heard.’

The same usage is also attested for the passive aorist (*-śrāvi* RV 10.93.14), statives (*śṛṇvé*, etc.) and middle perfect (stative?) *śuśruve* (RV 8.66.9),¹⁰ cf.:

(16) (RV 3.55.20c)

śṛṇv-é vīró

hear:PRES-3SG.STAT hero:NOM.SG

vindā-māno vāsūni

find:PRES-PART.MED:NOM.SG.M goods:ACC.PL

‘He is known as the hero finding goods.’

10. On this attestation and on other occurrences of the middle perfect, in the AVP and PB (passive or absolute transitive?), see Kümmel 2000: 532.

The inventory of formations attested in the two types of passive usages is summarized in the table below:

Table 1. Usages of the passive formations of *śru*

		Usages
	(α) agentless passive	(β) non-passive (anticausative)
Formations	pres. <i>śrūyāte</i> (AV+)	pres. <i>śrūyāte</i> (RV+)
	stative (3SG. <i>śṛṇvé</i> ,	etc.) (RV)
		passive aorist (- <i>śrāvi</i>) RV 10.93.14
		stative/middle perf. <i>śuśruve</i> RV 8.66.9

3.1.3 *khyā* (kśā) ‘see, consider, know’: *khyāyā*-^{te}

The present passive *khyāyā*-^{te} ‘is seen, known, etc.’, attested from the Brāhmaṇas onwards, occurs in agentless passive constructions. This present formation is attested almost exclusively in compounds with preverbs, foremost with *ā*, as in (17):

- (17) (ŚB 10.5.4.4)
- yād* *dīśa* *iti* *ca* *raśmāya* *iti* *ca*-
what:NOM.SG.N region:NOM.PL thus and rays:NOM.PL thus and
ākhyā-yā-te *tāl* *lokamprṇā*
consider-PRES.PASS-3SG that:NOM.SG.N lokam-prṇā:NOM.PL
‘That what is called both ‘regions’ and ‘rays’ is the lokam-prṇā¹¹ [bricks].’

In earlier texts, before the period of Vedic prose, passive usages are only found for rare non-present middle forms of *khyā*, viz. for the thematic aorist *-akhya*-^{ta} (only with the preverb *sām*). It is attested in an intransitive usage, meaning ‘appear together (with smb./smth.)’, in some contexts with the additional semantic nuance ‘appear together, and, by virtue of that, be considered/become associated (with smb./smth.)’. This intransitive usage can only be based on the original agentless passive (‘be seen/considered together (with smb./smth.)’), and this semantics still shimmers through the actually attested meanings. *sam-ākhyā*-^{ta} typically denotes a particular spiritual (sacral) contact or connection between deities or between a deity and his/her adepts. Cf. the two earliest occurrences (for a detailed analysis of the passive usage of this aorist, see Kulikov 2008):

11. Lit.: ‘filling the space’, i.e. the brick set up with the formula *lokam prṇa* ‘fill the world!’.

(18) (RV 9.61.7c)

sám ādityébhir akhya-ta
 together Āditya:INS.PL consider:AOR-3SG.MED
 '[Soma] has appeared together (and, by virtue of that, has become associated)
 with the Ādityas (a group of gods).'¹²

(19) (VS 4.23)

sám akhye devy-ā dhiy-ā
 together consider:AOR:1SG.MED divine-INS.SG insight-INS.SG
sám dākṣiṇayā- urú-caṣas-ā
 together Dakṣiṇā:INS.SG far-seeing-INS.SG
 'I have been considered together/have appeared together/(≈ I have become
 associated) with the divine insight, with the far-seeing Dakṣiṇā.'

3.1.4 ²vid 'know': vidé etc. and ¹vid 'find': vidyá-^{te}, avedi

There are two synchronically distinct, but etymologically related, roots *vid* in Vedic, ¹*vid* 'find' and ²*vid* 'know'. Both meanings can readily be traced back to the original semantics of the Common Indo-European root **ueǵd-* 'see', reconstructable for this root on the basis of evidence from other branches (cf. Latin *videre*, Old Church Slavonic *viděti* etc.; see Mayrhofer 1986–96 [EWAia]: II, 579f. for details), which is not preserved in Indo-Iranian.

The verbal system of ¹*vid* 'find' includes, among others, the aorist *ávidat*, present *vindáti*, and reduplicated perfect *vivéda*. By contrast, the paradigm of ²*vid* 'know' consists of the perfect without reduplication (3sg. *véda* etc.) and causative *vedáyati* 'makes know'.

The inventory of forms of ²*vid* 'know' attested in passive usages includes two third-person forms, 3sg. *vidé* and 3sg. *vidré*,¹³ as well as the participle *vidāna-* (with the accent on the root),¹⁴ which should be taken as statives rather than middle perfects (see Kümmel 1996: 104 and Kulikov 2006: 67f.). Cf.:

12. Cf. Geldner (1951: III, 42): 'Er wurde den Āditya's gleich gerechnet'; Renou (1961 [EVP VIII]: 31, 89): 'on l'a compté au nombre des Āditya'; Elizarenkova (1999: 42): 'On byl pričislen k Adit'jam.' Cf. also Gonda 1979: 21, with footnote 55.

13. See Kümmel 1996: 101f.

14. By contrast, the participle *vidāná-* (with the accent on the suffix) appears in non-passive constructions, in particular, in reflexive ('knowing oneself') and reciprocal usages (see Geldner 1917: 331, footnote 2; Kümmel 1996: 103f.).

(20) (RV 8.93.32ab)

dvitā yó vrtra-hán-tamo
 twice which:NOM.SG.M resistance-breaker-SUPERLAT:NOM.SG
vid-á indrah śatā-kratuḥ
 know:PERF-3SG.STAT Indra:NOM.SG hundred-power:NOM.SG.M
 ‘... Indra, who is known in two aspects, as the best resistance-breaker
 [and] as possessing hundred powers.’

By contrast, the inventory of passive formations of ¹*vid* ‘find’ includes the -yá-passive *vidyá-te* and the passive aorist *avedi*.

The -yá-present *vidyá-te* is employed in the agentless passive (‘is found, can be found’), especially with negation (‘is not found, cannot be found’), as in (21–22):

(21) (RV 5.44.9cd)

átrā ná hārdi kravaṇāsya reja-te
 here not heart:NOM.SG Kravaṇa:GEN.SG tremble:PRES-3SG.MED
yātrā matir vid-yá-te pūta-bāndhanī
 where prayer:NOM.SG find-PRES.PASS-3SG purified-connected:NOM.SG.F
 ‘The Kravaṇa’s heart does not tremble here, where the prayer is found that is
 connected with the purified [Soma].’

(22) (AVŚ 19.50.4 ≈ AVP 14.9.4)

yáthā śāmyākāḥ pra-pāta-nn [...]
 as particle.of.śāmī.tree:NOM.SG forth-fly:PRES-PART.ACT:NOM.SG.M
ná- anu-vid-yá-te
 not along-find-PRES.PASS-3SG
 ‘As a (tiny) particle of śāmī-tree,¹⁵ flying forth [...], cannot be found ...’

Such agentless passive constructions can easily be de-agentivized, developing non-passive intransitive, or anticausative, usages. Thus, ‘is found, can be found’ (and, very frequently, with negation: ‘is not found, cannot be found’) easily transforms to ‘exists, is’ (‘does not exist, is not’), as in (23); the distinction between the meanings ‘is found’ and ‘exists’ cannot be drawn with accuracy in many cases:

15. Whitney and Roth’s edition of the AVŚ conjectures ⁺*śyāmākāḥ* (‘millet-seed’) against the manuscript reading *ś(y)āmyākāḥ*, but this emendation may be unnecessary. The word *śāmyākāḥ* (attested in the manuscripts) could perhaps refer to a tiny particle of *śāmī*-tree (used for producing fire) (A. Lubotsky, p.c.).

- (23) (RV 10.64.2c)

ná marḍitā vid-ya-te
 not showing.compassion:NOM.SG find-PRES.PASS-3SG
anyā ebhyaḥ
 other:NOM.SG.M they:ABL.PL

‘There is no one who shows compassion except for them.’

3.2 The case of a verb of speech: *vac* ‘speak; pronounce; call’: *ucyá-te*

Less trivial and typologically both rarer and more interesting is the instance of passive-to-anticausative transition attested for the passive of a verb of speech, *vac* ‘speak; pronounce; call’: *ucyá-te*.

There are two transitive usages attested for the verb *vac*: (α) with the accusative of speech (‘X_{NOM} says, pronounces S_{ACC}’), as in (24); and (β) with accusatives denoting the object of nomination and his/her/its name (‘X_{NOM} declares Y_{ACC} to be Z_{ACC}’; ‘X_{NOM} calls Y_{ACC} Z_{ACC}’),¹⁶ as in (25):

- (24) (RV 1.78.5ab)

āvocāma rāhūgaṇā agnáye
 say:AOR.1PL.ACT R.:NOM.PL Agni:DAT.SG
mādhumad vācaḥ
 honey.sweet:ACC.SG.N speech:ACC.SG

‘We, the Rāhūgaṇas, have pronounced for Agni a honey-sweet speech.’

- (25) (RV 3.54.19)

devānām dūtāḥ [...] ánāgān
 god:GEN.PL messenger:NOM.SG sinless:ACC.PL.M
no voca-tu
 we:ACC say:AOR-3SG.IMPV.ACT

‘Let the messenger of the gods ... declare us [to be] sinless.’

3.2.1 Agentless passive usages of *ucyá-te*

The passive counterpart of the latter transitive pattern, (β_{pass.}), is the agentless passive constructed with two nominatives (‘Y_{NOM} is called Z_{NOM}’), as in (26–27):

- (26) (RV 10.97.6cd)

vīpraḥ sá uc-ya-te bhiṣág
 poet:NOM.SG that:NOM.SG.M say-PRES.PASS-3SG healer:NOM.SG
 ‘That poet is called healer ...’

16. Cf. Delbrück 1888:173f.; Haudry 1977:329f.

(27) (AVŚ 11.4.15b)

vāto *ha* *prāṇá* *uc-ya-te*
 wind:NOM.SG PRTCL breath:NOM.SG say-PRES.PASS-3SG
 ‘Breath is called Vāta (the wind).’

In fact, this passive usage tends to be conceived as an anticausative, meaning ‘have the name N’, which, together with its transitive counterpart, can be considered as a causative pair ‘have the name N’ ~ ‘make have the name N, give the name N, call’.

3.2.2 Anticausative usages of *ucyá-te*

The transitive usage α underlies two intransitive patterns: ($\alpha_{\text{pass.}}$) the regular passive ‘S_{NOM} is said, pronounced’; and ($\alpha_{\text{anticaus.}}$) the non-passive intransitive (anticausative) pattern ‘S_{NOM} sounds’. An example of the passive pattern is given under (28):

(28) (RV 1.114.6a)

idám *pitṛ-é* *marút-ām*
 this:NOM.SG.N father-DAT.SG Marut-GEN.PL
uc-ya-te *vācaḥ*
 say-PRES.PASS-3SG speech:NOM.SG
 ‘This speech is pronounced for the Maruts’ father.’

The latter, anticausative, pattern¹⁷ has undoubtedly developed from the ordinary passive $\alpha_{\text{pass.}}$ through the stage of the agentless passive (‘X is pronounced [by smb.]’ → ‘X sounds’). Subsequently, this usage could be expanded to a larger class of subjects, so as to include, alongside sounds proper (speech, songs, etc.), a variety of sources of sound, such as tongue, pressing-stone,¹⁸ etc. Such a semantic derivation is typical of verbs of sounding; see Padučeva (1998: 19).

This type of usage has never become productive, however. The anticausative type ‘sound’ is much rarer than passive ($\alpha_{\text{pass.}}$), ‘be pronounced’. It only appears a few times in the RV and disappears in later texts. The following three R̥gvedic occurrences are taken by most or all translators as examples of the anticausative type:

(29) (RV 10.64.15c = 10.100.8c)

grāvā *yátra* *madhu-ṣúd*
 pressing.stone:NOM.SG where honey-sweet:NOM.SG.M
uc-yá-te *bṛhát*
 say-PRES.PASS-3SG loudly
 ‘... where the honey-pressing stone sounds loudly.’

17. Qualified by Grassmann (1873:1191) as “Passiv mit medialer Bedeutung”; cf. also Velankar (2003: 174): “This passive form is used in the active sense of ‘resound’”

18. On pressing-stones (*grāvan-*) and the sounds made by them, see Wright (2008).

(30) (RV 5.25.8ab)

táva dyumānto arcáyo grāvā- ivo
 your brilliant:NOM.PL.M ray:NOM.PL pressing.stone:NOM.SG as

c-ya-te bṛhāt
 say-PRES.PASS-3SG loudly

‘Your (sc. Agni’s) rays are brilliant; you [sound loudly] as the pressing-stone sounds loudly.’¹⁹

(31) (RV 3.57.5ab)

yá te jihvā mādhumatī sumedhā
 which:NOM.SG.F your tongue:NOM.SG honey.sweet:NOM.SG.F wise:NOM.SG.F

ágne devéṣ_u ūc-yá-ta urūcī
 Agni:VOC god:LOC.PL say-PRES.PASS-3SG far.reaching:NOM.SG.F

‘Your honey-sweet wise tongue, O Agni, which sounds towards/among the gods, the far-reaching one ...’²⁰

A remarkable feature shared by all these constructions is the presence of an adverb (*bṛhāt* ‘loudly’) or an adjective (*urūcī* ‘far-reaching’) syntactically connected with the verb or subject, respectively, which expresses the loud and far-reaching character of the sound: ‘S_{NOM} Adv./Adj.^{loud(ly)} sounds’.

Yet another occurrence of the passive *ucyate* that probably belongs to the same type is attested at RV 6.28.6 (see Kulikov 2001b: 164f; contra the interpretations offered by most translators).

To sum up, both varieties of agentless passive usages attested for *ucyá-te* drift to the non-passive (anticausative) type. However, while for (β_{pass}), the two types of usages (‘Y_{NOM} is called Z_{NOM}’/‘Y_{NOM} has the name Z_{NOM}’) remain virtually indistinguishable, in the case of (α_{pass}) the semantic shift from ‘S_{NOM} is said, pronounced’ to ‘S_{NOM} sounds’ constitutes a drastic lexicalization.

19. Or: ‘You have brilliant rays ...’ (thus Elizarenkova (1995:25) : ‘U tebjā sverkauščie lučī’). For the interpretation of this syntactically difficult passage, see (Geldner 1951:II, 22); Renou 1964 [EVP XIII]: 33 (‘(tu parles) haut comme parle la pierre-presseuse’), 117 (‘(tu résonnes) comme résonne ...’); Elizarenkova (1995:25 and 538); Velankar (2003:68).

20. Thus Geldner (1951:I, 405), Elizarenkova (1989:351 and 718). Renou (1958 [EVP IV]: 56) was hesitating in his comments on this passage (‘“*ucyáte*, « erklingt » G[e]ld[ner], en conformité avec les passages où le sujet est *grāvan* [...] Mais l’emploi usuel mène au sens de: est appelée, est dite”), but has eventually adopted Geldner’s interpretation (‘Ta langue [...] qui se fait entendre chez les dieux’) in his translation (Renou 1959 [EVP V]: 18).

3.2.3 Verbs of speech and verbs of perception and knowledge: Systemic relations

In spite of the fact that we do not find other verbs of saying or sounding instantiating the same passive to anticausative transition as attested for *ucyá-te* ‘sound’ (← ‘be pronounced’)/‘have the name’ (← ‘be called’), this passive verb should not be considered isolated. In fact, *vac* ‘say, pronounce, call’, as a member of the class of verbs of speech, can be grouped together with verbs of perception (discussed in §3.1) for good reasons.²¹ Altogether, both verbs of perception and verbs of speech form a larger semantic class, which can be determined as verbs of knowledge transfer. By virtue of some particular semantic and epistemic features, verbs of this class display a particularly clear tendency to develop anticausative usages from their passives.

Note that yet another verbal root, ¹*vid* ‘find’ (etymologically related to ²*vid* ‘know’; see 3.1.4), can also be considered as belonging to the semantic class of knowledge transfer, together with such verbs as ‘see’ or ‘know’.²² As a matter of fact, the process of finding an object has direct implications for our knowledge of this object. This accounts for the semantic development ‘see’/‘know’ → ‘find’ attested for this verbal root in Indo-Iranian.

This semantic feature of ¹*vid* ‘find’ may be responsible for the agentless passive usage attested for its passives, the present *vidyá-te* and the aorist *avedi*. As mentioned above (§3.1.4), these passives readily develop into non-passive intransitives (anticausatives): ‘is found, can be found’ → ‘exists, is’, as illustrated in (21–22). Note that this semantic development is typical of intransitive (passive or reflexive) derivatives of the verb ‘find’; cf. Germ. *sich finden*, Fr. *se trouver*, Ital. *trovarsi*, Pol. *znajdować się*, Russ. *naxodit’-sja*, etc. Needless to say that the distinction between the meanings ‘is found’ and ‘exists’ cannot be drawn with accuracy in many cases.

3.3 Passive to anticausative transition in other semantic classes

Yet another semantic class which exhibits the passive to anticausative transition consists of a few verbs of **causation of motion**. These include, among others, the present passives *-kīryá-te* ‘be scattered; fall (down)’ (root *kř*), *rudhyá-te/(ti)* ‘be kept; move, adhere’ (in some compounds) (root *rudh*), *sicyá-te* ‘be poured; pour (out)’ (root *sic*), *srjyá-te* ‘be set free, be emitted; run’ (root *sic*), and *vacyá-te* ‘move (waveringly)’ (root *vañc*). For some constructions, both passive and anticausative interpretations are possible (as in (33)). Cf.:

21. See also Rogers (1971, 1972) on the semantic affinity of verbs of perception and such predicates as *sound*.

22. See, for instance, Sibley (1955) on relationships between seeking, finding and seeing.

- (32) (TS 1.8.12.1.a = TB 1.7.6.1)

dévīr āpaḥ sám mādhumatīr
 divine:NOM.PL.F water:NOM.PL together sweet:NOM.PL.F
mādhumatibhiḥ sṛj-ya-dhvam
 sweet:INS.PL.F release-PRES.PASS-2PL.IMPV

‘O divine waters, unite (lit.: run together), the sweet ones with the sweet ones!’

- (33) (ŚB 3.5.3.16)

yadā vāi striy-āi ca puṁs-ás ca
 when verily woman-DAT.SG and man-GEN/ABL.SG and
sam-tap-yá-té ’tha rétaḥ sic-ya-te
 together-heat-PRES-3SG.MED then semen:NOM.SG pour-PRES.PASS-3SG
 ‘Verily, when [the love] arises (lit. warms up) both from a man and towards
 a woman, then the semen pours [out]/is poured ...’

- (34) (KS 8.1:83.5–7 = KpS 6.6:64.9–11)

kālakāñjā vai nāma- asurā āsaṁs.
 Kālakāñja:NOM.PL PRCL name Asura:NOM.PL be:IMPF:3PL.ACT
ta iṣṭakā acinvata. tad indra
 that:NOM.PL.M brick:ACC.PL pile:IMPF:3PL.MED then Indra:NOM.SG
iṣṭakām apy upādhatta. teṣāṃ
 brick:ACC.SG additionally upon.put:IMPF:3SG.MED that:GEN.PL.M
mithunau divam ākrametām. tatas tām
 pair:NOM.DU heaven:ACC.SG climb.up:IMPF:3DU.MED then that:ACC.SG.F
āvṛhaṭ te vākīr-ya-nta
 tear.off:IMPF:3SG.ACT that:NOM.PL.M down.scatter-IMPF.PASS-3PL

‘There were Asuras (= demons) called Kālakāñjas. They piled bricks. Then Indra put an additional brick upon. They climbed up to heaven in pairs. Then he (sc. Indra) tore off that [brick]. They (sc. these Asuras) fell down.’

In example (34), it is particularly clear that the demons are not thrown but fall; that is, we are confronted with a spontaneous event, indirectly triggered by pulling out a brick.

Again, the origin of such non-passive usages must lie in their semantics, but the scenario of the passive to anticausative transition is different from the one attested for verbs of perception. Verbs belonging to the class of caused motion, such as *throw* (= ‘make fall, make fly’), *send* (= ‘make go, make move’), etc., can easily be conceptualized as causatives. Since for many such verbs, the present passive with the suffix *-yá-* is the only regular intransitive derivative, it could occasionally take over the anticausative function. This secondary function could further be supported by the influence of the middle non-passive presents with the suffix *-ya-* and root accentuation (class IV presents in the traditional Indian classification) derived from some verbs of motion,

such as *pádyate* ‘falls’ or *ríyate* ‘whirls, swirls’ (see, for instance, Kulikov 1997). Note that these anticausative *-ya*-presents are typically opposed to morphological causatives (cf. *pādáyati* ‘makes fall’, *riṇáti* ‘makes whirl, makes swirl’). This type of passive to anticausative transition deserves a separate study and will not be discussed in detail in this paper.

4. Typological parallels from other Indo-European languages

The cases of passive to anticausative transition attested in early Vedic and discussed at length in the preceding section do not represent of course a unique typological feature of the Old Indo-Aryan linguistic system. Similar phenomena can also be found both within the Indo-European linguistic family and beyond.

Thus, Latin grammatical studies repeatedly notice the fact that some morphological passives may be employed in usages which do not instantiate a ‘canonical passive type’, but rather should be qualified as ‘medio-passives’. In such usages, the activity in question is conceived as ‘internal’, rather than originating from some external agentive force – whence the term ‘passif intrinsèque’ (used in the French literature on Latin passives; see Flobert 1975: 37; Touratier 1994: 175f.), as opposed to the canonical ‘passif extrinsèque’.²³ This is, in particular, the case with the Latin passive *videri* ‘be seen’ → ‘appear, seem’ (which can be constructed with the dative of Experiencer), as in (35):

- (35) (Cic., Lael. 86) (Touratier 1994: 562f.)
- | | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| ... <i>cetera</i> | <i>quae</i> | <i>quibusdam</i> |
| other:NOM.PL.N | that:NOM.PL.N | some:DAT.PL |
| <i>admirabilia</i> | <i>videntur</i> ... | |
| wonderful:NOM.PL.N | see:PRES.PASS:3PL | |
- ‘... other things that seem wonderful to some people ...’

Similar semantic shifts are attested for a number of other Latin passives, in particular, for some verbs of caused motion, cf.:

- (36) (Caes., B.G. IV,10,3) (Claflin 1946: 205)
- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| <i>Rhenus</i> [...] | <i>citatus</i> | <i>fertur</i> |
| Rhine | quick | carry:PRES.PASS:3SG |
- ‘The quick Rhine rushes ...’

23. See also Claflin (1942: 1943) on ‘middle’ usages of Latin passives. For a discussion of the terminology, see Flobert (1975: 36f., Footnote 7).

Obviously, such usages instantiate a development similar to what we observe in the case of Vedic verbs of perception and knowledge transfer.²⁴ Yet, there is an important difference between these seemingly identical diachronic processes attested in two genetically related languages, Vedic and Latin. Latin morphological passives of the type *amatur* are historically related to the Proto-Indo-European middle (see, e.g., Claflin 1927:160ff. and Sihler 1995:470ff. for a general survey), which is at least one of the diachronic sources of the Latin passive. Accordingly, its non-passive ('medio-passive') usages may instantiate archaic traces of the earlier linguistic situation, being the vestige of (some) non-passive functions of the middle forms in the proto-language.²⁵

By contrast, Vedic passive presents with the suffix *-yá-* and passive aorists in *-i/-ran* (*-ram*) represent an Indo-Iranian innovation (see e.g. Szemerényi 1990:271; Kümmel 1996), which was not based on the Proto-Indo-European middle.²⁶ It was specially created to express the passive function, taking it over from the middle of the proto-language. Its non-passive usages cannot therefore be explained as archaisms.

Similar phenomena are attested for passives of verbs of perception and knowledge transfer in many other languages, both within the Indo-European language family and beyond. Thus, in Modern Greek, where the passive function is regularly rendered by middle forms, passives of verbs of perception are commonly employed in agentless, or 'generic' (in terms of Manney 2000), usages, as in (37):

- (37) Mod. Greek (Manney 2000:116)
- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>akústike</i> | <i>óti</i> | <i>óli i ipálili</i> |
| hear:3SG:MID/A | COMP | all-the-employees:NOM |
| <i>tu ipúryiu</i> | <i>laðóθikan</i> | |
| the-ministry | bribe:3PL:MID/A | |
- 'It was rumored that all the employees of the ministry were bribed.'

Note also the Slavic reflexes of the Indo-European root for 'see' and 'know', **ueid-*, which display similar features. Thus, the Old Church Slavonic present passive participle made from this root, *vidimъ*, regularly shows up with the meaning 'visible', rather than 'being seen' (cf. lexicographic marks such as 'used as adjective' in Blagova et al. 1994:115), even in spite of the presence of an instrumental agent, as in (38):

24. Flobert's classification of the Latin 'passifs intrinsèques' (≈ anticausatives based on passives) is quite different, however, and in some respects, appears not quite adequate. Thus, the passive *videri* 'be seen, appear' is grouped with such verbs as *gigni* 'be born', *frangi* 'break' etc. under the cover term "mutatifs (être, paraître, situation)".

25. This is the claim advocated, in particular, by Claflin (1927, 1942).

26. The only passive formation which must be historically related to the Proto-Indo-European middle is the stative, virtually limited to the language of the RV.

- (38) Old Church Slavonic (Mariinskoe evangelie 1.23.5)
- vbsě*

all

že

PRTCL

děla

deed:ACC.PL

svoě

REFL.POSS:ACC.PL.N

tvoręť

do:PRES:3PL

da

IMPV.PRTCL

vid-im-i

see-PRES.PASS.PART-NOM.PL.M

bōdōť

be:FUT:3PL

člvěky

man:INS.PL

‘[They] do all their deeds in order to be seen by men / visible to men.’

The same semantic shift is attested for the cognates of these forms in many other Slavic languages – in particular, in Russian (cf. *vidimyj* ‘visible’ etc.).

5. The de-agentivization of passives: A general scenario

5.1 From passive to anticausative through impersonalization

The scenario of evolution within the system of voices discussed above is represented below within the framework of the Leningrad/St. Petersburg Typology Group:

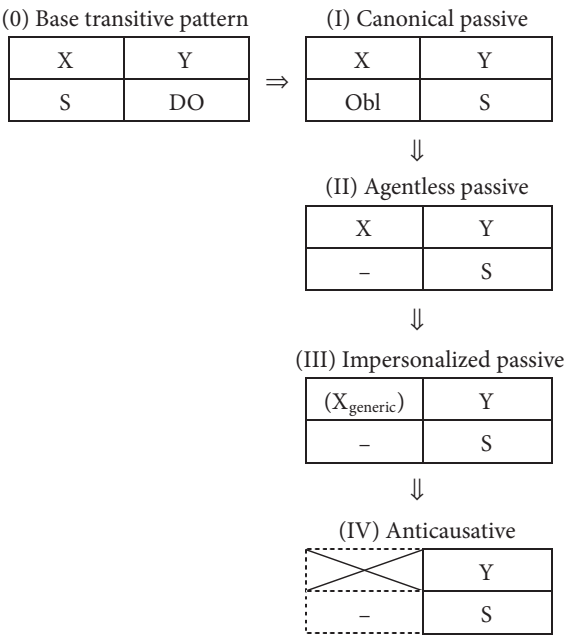


Figure 1. General scenario of passive to anticausative transition

For the sake of convenience, this schema opens with the pattern representing the canonical passive (which is directly related to the corresponding transitive pattern). Most importantly, between the stages of agentless passive and anticausative we observe a compulsory transitional stage of impersonalization. While the standard agentless passive can be conceived as mere omission of the agentive noun phrase from the structure,

its impersonalization implies a much more drastic change to the semantics of the sentence – specifically, to the referential status of the Actor. The Actor is conceptualized as generic, or non-referential (cf. (III)). This type can readily evolve further into a pattern where the Actor is entirely lacking from the structure – that is, into the anticausative.

Such a diachronic scenario is theoretically possible for all agentless passives, but, in fact, it is particularly common for a few compact, relatively small semantic classes of verbs, such as verbs of perception and knowledge transfer. The epistemic roots of this development must reside in the semantic nature of these classes.

5.2 Epistemic roots of impersonalization

To begin with, let us take a closer look at the semantic evolution of the passive of the Indo-European verbal root **uejd-* ‘see’/‘know’, which instantiates a typical passive to anticausative transition. As already mentioned, this scenario can be outlined as follows:

- (39) ‘Y is seen (known etc.) by smb.’
 ↓↓
 ‘Y is seen (known etc.) [by smb.]’
 ↓↓
 ‘Y is seen (known etc.) [by Ø_{generic}]’
 ↓↓
 ‘Y is visible (famous, etc.).’

In all such cases we observe the rise of the anticausative usages through the stage which is called ‘impersonalization’ by Siewierska (1984: 241 et passim). The epistemic roots of such impersonalization of passives must lie in the phenomenon of ‘objectivization of knowledge’. In other words, knowledge is easily conceptualized as having no subject – i.e. as ‘knowledge without a knowing subject’; see, for instance, Lyons 1979: 129 (referring to Popper 1972; see especially p. 73f. and Chapters 3–4) and Ziff 1984: 12ff. For a detailed discussion of the objectivization of knowledge, see Rojszczak 2005: 146ff., where this process is explained as based on several conditions: (1) “making knowledge independent of time”, which suggests, in particular, that (1.1) “we do not need any knowing subject at all to perform an act at a particular point in time, because knowledge exists without any empirical subject”; (1.2) “absolutization of knowledge with regard to the act of knowledge”; ... (2) making knowledge independent (objective) with regard to space; etc.

It is not necessary to enter here into a detailed discussion of the philosophical and epistemic aspects of objective knowledge. For our purposes, suffice it to mention that this process easily accounts for the impersonalization of agentless passives. Accordingly, the agentive force can be entirely removed from the scene, which results in a complete ‘de-agentivization’ of the original (agentless) passive. Subsequently, such de-agentivized passives evolve into anticausatives, as shown in the scheme above.

6. Concluding terminological remarks:
Impersonal vs. impersonalized passive

To conclude this short discussion of impersonalized passives, it is worth pointing out an important terminological distinction, closely related to the subject of the present paper.

Impersonalized passives, often nearly indistinguishable from agentless passives, are sometimes (quite understandably) labelled ‘impersonal passives’. Thus, on the German web-site <http://www.englisch-hilfen.de>, which provides grammatical help for German students learning English, the phrases (40–41) (see http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/grammar/personal_passive.htm) are qualified as ‘impersonal passives’ – in spite of the presence of overt subjects in both cases:

(40) *It is said that children are afraid of ghosts.*

(41) *Children are said to be afraid of ghosts.*

Yet, in the literature on passives, the term ‘impersonal passives’ (also known as back-grounding passive) is typically employed to refer to quite a different phenomenon: passives with no direct object to subject promotion, where, accordingly, the subject position remains vacant. Handbook examples of impersonal passives are usually taken from such languages as Dutch, German or Polish, cf., for instance, examples quoted in Siewierska (1984: 96f). (Ch. 3 is dedicated to the phenomenon of impersonal passive):

(42) German

Es wurde getanz.
it PASS.AUX:PAST:3SG dance:PASS.PART
‘There is dancing.’

This frequent terminological confusion is due to the properties of the two phenomena in question. The affinity of the corresponding terms originates, quite naturally, in the structural affinity of the impersonalized and impersonal passive (see especially Siewierska 2008), as illustrated in the scheme below:

Impersonal passive (subjectless passive)		Impersonalized passive (agentless passive)	
X _(generic)	Y	(X _{generic})	Y
(Obl/) –	DO	–	S

Figure 2. Impersonal vs. impersonalized passive

Impersonal passives do not promote the direct object to the subject position and therefore lack a subject. By contrast, impersonalized passives do promote the direct

object to the subject position. Thus, whilst impersonalized passives can be described as **agentless**, impersonal passives are **subjectless** – which, however, does not rule out the presence of an agent (surfacing as an oblique noun phrase). This constitutes a crucial difference between these two voice categories. Yet, in both cases the status of the main participant of the situation, the Actor, is similar; it ranks somewhere between unimportant and non-specified, non-referential or generic. In both cases, this feature leads to the removal of the corresponding noun from the structure.²⁷

Another important difference between these two categories concerns their diachronic potential. Impersonalized passives can easily evolve into anticausatives, while for impersonal passives this path of evolution is closed.

This terminological confusion remained almost unnoticed in the literature till recently. Rare exceptions included Siewierska (1984) and Pinkster (1992:163), who rightly pointed out that “[t]he term ‘impersonal’ is also used, however, as some sort of synonym of ‘agentless,’” mentioning a few standard grammars, where this terminological confusion can be found. Now, fortunately, more attention is paid to this important distinction; see Siewierska 2008, distinguishing between subject-defocusing and agent-defocusing approaches to the analysis of impersonal passives.

Future research should pay more attention to the study of the impersonalized passive and, particularly, to its diachronic aspects. Of particular relevance are the relationships between impersonalized passives and anticausatives as well as, in general, their position and possible paths of development within the system of valency-reducing categories.

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Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	DAT	dative
ACT	active	DO	direct object
AOR	aorist	F	feminine
FUT	future	OPT	optative

27. The ‘impersonal’ character of the agentless passive is noticed, for instance, by Luukka & Markkanen (1997:174ff).

GEN	genitive	PART	participle
IMPV	imperative	PASS	passive
INF	infinitive	PERF	perfect
INJ	injunctive	PL	plural
INS	instrumental	PRTCL	particle
LOC	locative	PRES	present
MED	middle	S	subject
N	neuter	SG	singular
NOM	nominative	STAT	stative
OBL	oblique (object)		

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