

A UNIFIED ACCOUNT OF PASSIVES AND CAUSATIVES: THE CASE OF MONGOLIAN AND JAPANESE¹

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1 Introduction

This paper aims to justify the following proposals. First, Mongolian is a low-passive language, whereas Japanese is a high-passive language. Second, passives and causatives are subject to a unified analysis. Third, introduction of arguments as potential subjects (predicate-internal subjects), notated as *sbj*, through voice heads is mirrored by affixation of voice morphemes. Fourth, there are at least three different heights of *sbj* and corresponding voice suffixes. Fifth, a last-merged *sbj* is promoted to *SBJ*, with others, if any, demoted or suppressed, instantiating Relativized Minimality. Sixth, there is only one type of argument-introducer, namely, Voice.



This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 outlines passives, causatives and passive-causative interactions in Mongolian and Japanese. Section 3 explains how Mongolian and Japanese differ with respect to passives and causatives. Section 4 elaborates on (1) and presents theoretical arguments for unifying passives and causatives under Voice from the Minimalist perspective.

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2 Passive-Causative Interaction

In Mongolian and Japanese, a passive affix, notated as PS, may either precede or follow a causative affix, notated as CS, instantiating either a causative-of-passive or a passive-of-causative structure. On the basis of their syntactic and semantic properties, PS and CS can be classified into lexical and syntactic suffixes, notated as PS/CS_{lex} and PS/CS_{syn}.

2.1 Mongolian

PSs in Mongolian include *-gd*, *-d*, *-t*, and their allomorphs. Among them, *-gd* is productive, and the other two are available in a very limited number of verbs. CSs in Mongolian include *-uul/-gul*, *-lg*, *-aa/ga* and their allomorphs. All of them are productive, but the first two differ from the third one both syntactically and semantically.

(2) PS and CS in Mongolian²

PS	<i>-gd</i> (<i>-gda</i> , <i>-gde</i>)	<i>-d</i> (<i>-da</i> , <i>-de</i>)	<i>-t</i> (<i>-ta</i> , <i>-te</i>)
CS	<i>-uul</i> (<i>-uul</i> , <i>-üül</i>) <i>-gul</i> (<i>-gul</i> , <i>-gül</i>)	<i>-lg</i> (<i>-lga</i> , <i>-lge</i> , <i>-lgo</i> , <i>-lgö</i>)	<i>-aa</i> (<i>-aa</i> , <i>-ee</i> , <i>-oo</i> , <i>-öö</i>) <i>-ga</i> (<i>-ga</i> , <i>-ge</i> , <i>-go</i> , <i>-gö</i>)

In each of the PS and CS groups, not only morphological but also syntactic and semantic variation is observed. One property that this paper is particularly concerned with is the distinction between the lexical and syntactic functions of the morphemes. In distinguishing PS_{lex} and PS_{syn}, we have the following facts. First, V-PS_{lex} always has an idiomatic reading with a semantic-drift effect rather than a canonical passive reading. This is not true for V-PS_{syn}, which always requires the suppressed argument to have an agentive interpretation. For example, *neme-gd* means “increase (intr)”, not “be added”. For this verb, if a dative argument is present, it is not interpreted as an agent.³

- (3) Nad-d hüč neme-**gd**-ve.
1st-DAT strength-NOM add-PS-PST
‘For me, strength increased.’
*‘Strength was increased by me.’

Second, an idiomatic reading, not a canonical passive reading, is possible with *-d* and *-t*.⁴ This means that the more compact PS is, the weaker the passive meaning becomes.

- (4) Nad-d nig sonin duu sons-**d**-ve.
1st-DAT a strange sound-NOM hear-PS-PST
‘To me, a strange sound was heard.’
*‘A strange sound was heard by me.’

² The use of these suffixes complies with vowel harmony. See Kullmann and Tserenpil (2015: 117) for details.

³ As we will see in section 3, V-PS_{lex} is in fact a fake passive verb and PS_{lex} is not a genuine passive marker.

⁴ Typical examples, few though, include the following: *sons-d* ‘be heard’, *ol-d* ‘be found’, *huur-d* ‘be deceived’, *av-t* ‘lose, be taken’, *hür-t* ‘receive, (Literally ‘be reached’)’.

A few facts help distinguish CS_{lex} from CS_{syn}. First, scope ambiguity can be observed when the verb is modified by adverbials such as *hurdan* ‘quickly’ and *zoriud* ‘deliberately’.

- (5) Bi Badma-g zoriud ir-**üül**-ve.
 I Badma-ACC deliberately come-CS-PST
 ‘I asked Badma to deliberately come.’
 ‘I deliberately asked Badma to come.’
- (6) Bi Badma-d em-g-ni hurdan uu-**lg**-ve.
 I Badma-DAT medicine-ACC-RX quickly drink-CS-PST
 ‘I quickly gave the medicine to Badma to drink.’
 ‘I gave the medicine to Badma to quickly drink.’

Given that such adverbials may be interpreted as modifying either the event denoted by V or the event denoted by V-CS, there must be two events of different levels. This leads to the claim that V is a morpheme at the lexical level and CS is one at the syntactic level, allowing us to say that *-üül* and *-lg* in the above examples are syntactic causative morphemes (CS_{syn}). Importantly, not all causatives allow scope ambiguity with such adverbials. As exemplified by (7), the adverbial modification goes for V-CS, not for V. This said, *-aa* in (7) is a lexical causative suffix (CS_{lex}).

- (7) Bid daisan-ig zoriud sön-**öö**-ve.
 we enemy-ACC deliberately die out-CS-PST
 ‘We deliberately eliminated the enemy.’
 ‘*We made the enemy deliberately die out/be eliminated.’

Second, *-aa*, which is restricted to verbs with a direct causation meaning, never follows any other CS or PS; that is, *-uul* and *-lg* as well as *-gd* are never embedded under *-aa*.

- (8) hat-**aa**-lg ‘make someone dry something’
 dry-CS-CS
- (9) šat-**aa**-gd ‘be burnt’
 burn-CS-PS
- (10) *bai-gul-**aa** ‘Intened meaning: cause someone to build something’
 be-CS-CS
- (11) *ala-gd-**aa** ‘Intened meaning: cause someone to be killed’
 kill-PS-CS

Given that morphemes at the syntactic level are always attached higher than those at the lexical level are, *-aa* can only be CS_{lex}.

Third, transmission of energy is observed between the causer and the causee in the case of lexical causatives, whereas it is not necessarily observed in the case of syntactic causatives.⁵

⁵ See Hashimoto (2019) for detailed discussion of transmission of energy in Mongolian causatives. See Bai (2024) for more details of the lexical-syntactic division.

PS and CS are combined in three ways in Mongolian. PS_{lex} precedes CS_{syn}, CS_{lex} precedes PS_{syn}, and PS_{syn} precedes CS_{syn}. CS_{syn} never precedes PS_{syn}. In (13), *bod-gd* is a fake passive, with PS_{lex} *-gd* failing to produce a passive meaning, as is the case with *neme-gd*. CS *-uul* added, the verb denotes an event in which, for example, his success and failure cause the issue to occur in my mind. In (14), *šat-aa* ‘burn (tr)’ is a lexical causative, and *šat-aa-gd* ‘be burned’ is its passive form. In (15), the transitive verb *tani* ‘recognize’ is passivized, and the derived outcome *tani-gd* ‘be recognized’ undergoes causativization to create *tani-gd-uul* ‘cause to be recognized’.

- (12) a. PS_{lex}-CS_{syn} (Ex., (13))
 b. CS_{lex}-PS_{syn} (Ex., (14))
 c. PS_{syn}-CS_{syn} (Ex., (15))

(13) Tüün-ne бүтүмž ba ilagdal ni nad-d nig asuudal-ig bod-gd-uul-la.
 his success and failure-NOM TOP 1st-SG-DAT an issue-ACC think-PS-CS-PST
 ‘His success and failure reminded me of an issue.’ (Malcinhuu, *Uran Šubuuhai*)

(14) Itgegčid bolon tede-ne ariun sudaruud gal-d šat-aa-gd-ve.
 followers and their holy books-NOM fire-DAT burn-CS-PS-PST
 ‘The followers and their holy books were burned in the fire.’

(*Alma-in Nom: Alma-in Huu Asan: Ch.4*)

(15) Dorž-ig aav-d-ni tani-gd-uul-h-gui-in tuld sahal naa-san.
 Dorž-ACC father-DAT-RX recognize-PS-CS-INF-NEG-GEN for beard attach-PST
 ‘In order not to make Dorž recognized by his father, I attached beard to his face.’

(Umetani 2006: 95)

2.2 Japanese

There are two passive verb suffixes in Japanese, namely, *-are* and *-rare*, which are both productive. Common causative suffixes in Japanese include *-e*, *-s*, *-as*, *-ase* and *-sase*.

(16) PS and CS in Japanese

PS	<i>-are, -rare</i>
CS	<i>-e, -s, -os, -as -ase, -sase</i>

Unlike Mongolian causatives and passives, those in Japanese have been extensively discussed by linguists, among which Shibatani (1976), Jacobsen (1992), Kuroda (1993), Miyagawa (1984, 1998), Harley (2008), Pyllkkänen (2008) and others have discussed the lexical-syntactic distinction of CS. PS in Japanese hardly displays a property of what we label PS_{lex} in this paper. Unlike Mongolian PS, Japanese PS has no idiomatic reading, and semantic drift is rare. Like Mongolian causatives, Japanese causatives display the property that an embedded CS is CS_{lex} and an embedding CS is CS_{syn}, as discussed by, for example, Kuroda (1993: 8-10).

Japanese has three patterns of CS-PS layering, lacking PS_{lex}-CS_{syn}, which is available in Mongolian. Interestingly, Japanese has CS_{syn}-PS_{syn}, which Mongolian lacks.

- (17) a. CS_{lex}-PS_{syn} (Ex., (18))

- b. PS_{syn}-CS_{syn} (Ex., (19))
- d. CS_{syn}-PS_{syn} (Ex., (20))

(18) *Hoteru-no mae-de or-os-are-ta.*
 in front of hotel drop-CS-PS-PST
 ‘I was dropped off in front of the hotel.’

(19) *Ziroo-ga Hanako-o/ni Taroo-ni sikar-are-sase-ta.*
 Ziro-NOM Hanako-ACC/DAT Taro-DAT scold-PS-CS-PST
 ‘Ziro made Hanako be scolded by Taro.’ (Tsuji-mura 1996: 259)

(20) *Hiroko-ga pizza-o tabe-sase-rare-ta.*
 Hiroko-NOM pizza-ACC eat-CS-PS-PST
 ‘Hiroko was made to eat the pizza.’ (Harley 2013: 53)

For more discussions of causative-passive interactions, see Saito (1982), Tsujimura (1996) and Aoyagi (2021), among many others.

3 How Mongolian and Japanese Differ

Given the facts observed in section 2, there are at least three levels of affixation in passives and causatives. A lexical affix, notated as AF_{lex}, is attached lower than a syntactic affix, notated as AF_{syn}, which can be embedded under another AF_{syn}. We postulate three different levels of voice projection for voice suffixes, AF_{lex} and AF_{syn}, which are attached at three different heights.

(21) Patterns of PS-CS layering

Pattern	Mongolian	Japanese
a. [VoiceP3 [VoiceP2 [VoiceP1 [VP] -PS _{lex}] -CS _{syn}]]	(13)	
b. [VoiceP3 [VoiceP2 [VoiceP1 [VP] -CS _{lex}] -PS _{syn}]]	(14)	(18)
c. [VoiceP3 [VoiceP2 [VoiceP1 [VP]] -PS _{syn}] -CS _{syn}]]	(15)	(19)
d. [VoiceP3 [VoiceP2 [VoiceP1 [VP]] -CS _{syn}] -PS _{syn}]]		(20)

Importantly, the heights of PS and CS are mirrored by their compactness and variety. The lower an AF is attached, the more compact it is, and the greater the number of variants.

(22) Height-compactness/variety mirroring

		AF ₁ (Voice1)	AF ₂ (Voice2)	AF ₃ (Voice3)
Mongolian	PS	-gd, -d, -t	-gd	
	CS	-aa, -uul, -lg	-uul, -lg	-uul
Japanese	PS		-are, -rare	-rare
	CS	-e, -s, -os, -as, -ase	-ase, -sase	-sase

The differences between the two languages are intriguing. While Mongolian allows PS_{lex}-CS_{syn}, Japanese does not. Japanese has CS_{syn}-PS_{syn}, which Mongolian lacks. This leads to instantiation of the layered VoiceP structure varying between Mongolian and Japanese. To explain why

Mongolian, unlike many other languages, allows so-called “lexical passives”, it is necessary to confirm what qualifies as “passive”. Haspelmath (2024), the latest literature that addresses passive properties, identifies three properties as universals of passives under the definitions in (24), two of which are relevant here.

(23) a. **Universal 1**

In a passive construction, the oblique agent phrase is always optional. (Keenan & Dryer 2007: 330)

b. **Universal 2** (Universal 3 in Haspelmath 2024)

If active and passive constructions differ with respect to topicality of agent and patient, then the patient is more topical in the passive, or the agent is less topical, or both.

(24) a. **Passive voice alternation**

In a passive voice alternation, the uncoded alternant is transitive (with A- and P-arguments), and in the coded alternant, the basic A is downgraded, and the basic P corresponds to S.

b. **Passive voice construction**

A passive voice construction is the coded alternant in a passive voice alternation.

If these universals are true universals of passives, then what we label PS_{lex} in Mongolian is not a passive suffix, and $V-PS_{lex}$ is not a genuine passive verb because, for example, *neme-gd* in (3), repeated below as (25), which was discussed as a lexical passive in section 2, does not display the properties given in (23). First, the oblique phrase *nad-d* ‘for me’ is not an agent. Second, the patient *hüč* ‘strength’ is not more topical than *nad-d*. Moreover, the patient always follows the oblique phrase in such cases, which is not a property of a passive subject.

(25) *Nad-d hüč neme-gd-ve.*

1st-DAT strength-NOM add-PS-PST

‘For me, strength increased.’

*‘Strength was increased by me.’

This leads to the fact that the dative phrase rather than the patient could be the subject of the sentence in such cases. If this is true, the basic P does not correspond to S, contra (24a).

Bai (2023) observes that verbs such as *neme-gd* underwent a diachronic change in function and in present-day Mongolian, it is not a genuine passive. Bai (2023, 2024) labels such verbs “fake passives”, which means that they are “passive” morphologically but not semantically and syntactically. Accordingly, fake passive markers are lexical morphemes and genuine passive markers are all syntactic morphemes; what we label PS_{lex} is in fact a fake passive marker. For simplicity, we use both “ PS_{lex} ” and “fake passive” as terms in our discussion. Fake passives are quite productive in Mongolian. We argue that PS_{lex} spells out Voice1, as shown in (26). PS_{lex} does not spell out Voice2. Taking *neme* and *neme-gd* as an example, the complex $V+Voice1$ is assigned the morpheme *neme* by the Vocabulary Insertion rule when Voice1 introduces a DP as *sbj1* via external merge (EM), and *neme-gd* is inserted into the complex if Voice1 (re)introduces a DP as *sbj1* via internal merge (IM). In the first case, *sbj* is assigned the agent role, and in the second case, it is already assigned a patient role when it is base-generated within VP.

- (26) a. [_{VoiceP1} DP2(=sbj) ∅ [_{VP} DP1]] (transitive)
 b. [_{VoiceP1} DP1(=sbj) -gd [_{VP} t_{DP1}]] (fake passive)

Importantly, the derivation in (26b) does not qualify as a genuine passivization because the position an agent normally occupies is now occupied by a non-agent argument, hence the lack of agent in the structure. We argue that fake passives instantiate alternative structure building, which is based on a different lexical item. That is, *neme* and *neme-gd*, for example, are distinct lexemes in the strict sense, and they are stored independently in the lexicon.

It then follows that why PS_{lex} is available in Mongolian but not in Japanese can be attributed to the difference in the historical evolution of passives between the two languages. Gapless indirect passives were available in *Secret History of the Mongols*, which was composed in the 14th century, but they disappeared later and are not available in modern Mongolian. In contrast, gapless indirect passives were a later development in the history of Japanese. Note that the passive suffix in indirect passives should be PS_{syn}, which spells out a higher voice head. Given this, the contrast outlined above allows us to say that diachronically passivization came down to involve lower positions as target sites for promotion of an internal argument (IA) in Mongolian and it went up in Japanese. This contrast, in turn, accounts for why Japanese has CS_{syn}-PS_{syn} but Mongolian does not. Notably, PS_{syn} in CS_{syn}-PS_{syn} spells out the highest voice head (Voice3), which is supported by our data summarized in (21).

Importantly, despite these differences, relevant universals are at work in both languages. In addition to those universals in (23), we take the layered VoiceP structure as the universal of syntactic voice, as represented below, where instantiation of VoiceP and AF parametrically varies among languages. We elaborate on this in section 4.

- (27) [_{VoiceP3} [_{VoiceP2} [_{VoiceP1} [_{VP} V] AF₁] AF₂] AF₃]

4 Voice and VoiceP

To elaborate on (27), we first need to justify that PS is a bivalent functional head (Nie 2020b: 25ff), which introduces the embedded passive subject and a clausal complement; that is, the passive subject is licensed below T but outside VP. A crucial assumption here is that passivization does not necessarily involve the surface subject, notated as SBJ, in Spec of TP. When SBJ is involved, passivization is successive-cyclic (O→sbj→SBJ). Evidence comes from the causative-of-passive construction (“causative-passive” in Tsujimura 1996: 258-259) in Japanese and Mongolian. In (19), repeated below as (28), the internal argument (IA) *Hanako* can occur with DAT, not NOM, indicating that it has moved away from its base-generated position, where it would otherwise be assigned ACC, to a position lower than Spec of TP, a NOM position. As discussed by Aoyagi (2021: 99) and Saito (1982: 92), causative-of-passive sentences are derived from a passive phrase. As indicated by PS *-are* in (28) and (29), what *Hanako* underwent was passivization. The difference between (28) and (29) in passivization lies in the fact that in (28), the patient *Hanako* is passivized into a non-NOM position and stops there, whereas in (29), after passivization applies, *Hanako* further moves to Spec of TP, a NOM position, from a non-NOM position.

- (28) Ziroo-ga Hanako-o/ni Taroo-ni sikar-**are-sase**-ta.
 Ziroo-NOM Hanako-ACC/DAT Taroo-DAT scold-PS-CS-PST
 ‘Ziroo made Hanako be scolded by Taroo.’ (Tsuji-mura 1996: 259)

- (29) Hanako-ga Taroo-ni sikar-**are**-ta.
 Hanako-NOM Taroo-DAT scold-PS-PST
 ‘Hanako was scolded by Taroo.’ (Tsuji-mura 1996: 258)

According to Aoyagi (2021: 100), it is Spec of a high Applicative head that serves as the landing site of IA in passivization. Leaving aside the details of this head, what suffices for the current purposes is that IA can move to a non-NOM position, instantiating ACC-to-DAT raising (A-to-D raising),⁶ which is embedded under a causative head, spelled out by *-sase*.

A-to-D raising, however, cannot represent a sentence since a NOM argument is yet to merge. How a DP is introduced and becomes the NOM argument depends on the head that selects the phrase constructed by A-to-D raising. That head may either be another argument-introducing head or be a tense-aspect related head. In the first case, the derivation extends in the voice domain, giving rise to a causative-(of-passive) structure (28), whereas in the latter, it proceeds into the tense-aspect domain, remaining a passive structure (29). Importantly, passivization is already completed by promoting *Hanako*, as shown in (30), regardless of where it ends up in the surface structure, given that promotion of IA and suppression of an external argument (EA) make up the core property of passivization.

- (30) A-to-D raising as passivization:
 [TP [VoiceP2 Hanako_i(DAT) [VoiceP1 Taroo [VP t_i(ACC) sikar]] -are]] ...

A-to-D raising is not available in Mongolian, which, however, has A-to-A raising, as exemplified by (15), repeated as (31).

- (31) Dorž-ig aav-d-ni tani-**gd-uul-h-gui**-in tuld sahal naa-san.
 Dorž-ACC father-DAT-RX recognize-PS-CS-INF-NEG-GEN for beard attach-PST
 ‘In order not to make Dorž recognized by his father, I attached beard to his face.’
 (Umetani 2006: 95)

- (32) A-to-A raising as passivization:
 [TP [VoiceP2 Dorž_i(ACC) [VoiceP1 aav [VP t_i(ACC) tani]] -gd]] ...

A-to-A raising is also available in Japanese. In the relevant construction, dative-accusative alternation is observed with the causee, which is base-generated as the patient within VP. A-to-D raising (Japanese) and A-to-A raising (Mongolian and Japanese) already represent passivization. Building the structure up to [VoiceP2 sbj_{2i} [VoiceP1 sbj₁ [VP t_i]]] for (28) and (31), if no DP is introduced as sbj₃, then sbj₂ is promoted to SBJ in Spec of TP, instantiating successive-cyclic passivization. If a DP is introduced as sbj₃, sbj₂ fails promotion, as a Relativized Minimality effect, and remains non-nominative (see also Poole 2016 for discussion on RM of subjecthood observed in other languages). Moreover, given that in passives, the agentive DP is syntactically projected as an implicit argument, labeled KP (Collins 2024), Spec of vP (VoiceP1 here) cannot

⁶ “A-to-D raising” of course does not necessarily mean that ACC and DAT are actually assigned; it means that a DP undergoes raising from a position where ACC is assigned normally to another position where DAT is assigned.

be open for the passive subject, as predicted by Kratzer's (1996: 132) Realization Principle and Legate's (2012: 234) statement that internal merge must target every new label.

(33) **The Realization Principle:**

Arguments of a head must be realized within the projection of that head.

This necessitates Voice₂-over-Voice₁. For Voice₃-over-Voice₂, the common syntactic properties of causatives and passives as interconnected voice constructions and those observations in section 2 serve as sound reasoning. Additional support is found in Nie (2020a), who argues that the Voice-over-Voice configuration assigns causative semantics.

These findings suggest that Voice is the very argument-introducer in passives and causatives. According to Wood and Marantz (2017), an argument-introducer has a selectional feature [S:D], which is satisfied by selecting a DP as an argument. They argue that the argument-introducer (their *i**) is an independent head that can mediate between a DP and a bare head that is unable to introduce an argument on its own right. However, in contrast to Wood and Marantz (2017), this paper argues that Voice, being a truly autonomous syntactic head, is the very argument-introducer with [S:D] and EPP. [S:D] and EPP on Voice are satisfied by introducing a DP, which therefore acquires subjecthood. Importantly, the DP to introduce is not necessarily a bearer of the external role. That is, Voice does not specify whether the argument it introduces is EA or IA. Any of Voice₁, Voice₂ and Voice₃ can introduce a DP as either type of argument. A DP is EA if EM applies, and it is IA if IM applies. Therefore, Voice_[PASSIVE/MIDDLE] and Voice_[ACTIVE/CAUSATIVE] or their equivalents do not exist in the strict sense. Voice is not endowed with dedicated voice-specifying features. The theta-role that a DP bears is not relevant to the nature of Voice as an argument-introducer. Voice is thus a potential-subject-introducer (sbj-introducer), not simply an external-argument-introducer.

Arguments are introduced as potential subjects (Voice-internal subjects) through voice heads, which is mirrored by affixation of voice morphemes, PS and CS. A last-merged sbj is promoted to SBJ, and others, if any, remain non-NOM arguments, instantiating Relativized Minimality, represented in (1).

All this said, we claim that there is only one type of argument-introducer, namely, Voice, in the inventory of functional heads in Universal Grammar; Voice as a functional head is the only engine that operates on syntactic derivation of voice constructions; clauses are built by introducing arguments as potential subjects through voice heads; voice alternations are derived by the interaction among the merge type (EM and IM) of arguments, their suppression or demotion and the height of the position to (re)introduce them.

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