

Preface

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The Syntax of Norwegian Passive Constructions

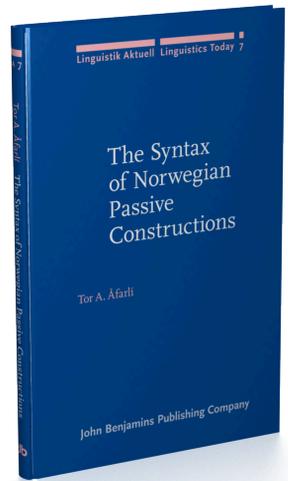
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Preface

This is primarily a book about the syntax of Norwegian passive constructions and more indirectly about the passive phenomenon in general. Related topics such as English passive constructions and Norwegian ergative constructions are also examined. The analyses are carried out within a Government and Binding (GB) framework (see e.g. Chomsky 1981 or Chomsky 1986a).

I think it is sensible to approach the passive phenomenon by way of Norwegian. The angle from which you walk into a landscape is decisive for your impression of it, but there is also a bird-eye's view. As far as the landscape of passives is concerned, it seems to me that the route from Norwegian provides an easier access to the bird-eye's view than the route from English, which was the point of departure for the first influential passive analyses within the GB framework.

The following provides an overview of the contents of this book. Chapter one contains a very brief introduction to GB syntax, as well as an introduction to the passive phenomenon itself, its manifestation in Norwegian, and its possible analysis within a GB framework. The passive analysis proposed by Chomsky (1981) (here called the "orthodox" analysis) is contrasted with an analysis that incorporates the thesis that "the passive morpheme" is an argument of the verb (see Jaeggli 1986, Roberts 1987, Baker 1988, or Baker, Johnson, and Roberts 1989). It is argued that the latter analysis (called the "new" analysis) should be preferred to the former. In fact, the whole book can be seen as an effort to apply the new analysis to Norwegian passives.

Chapters two and three examine the more basic properties of Norwegian passives, notably properties of Theta-role assignment and Case assignment respectively. In chapter two, the passive-morpheme-as-argument thesis is examined in detail, and its explanatory power is demonstrated. In chapter three, it is argued that the existence of impersonal passives in Norwegian should be explained by the assumption that passive verbs may assign postverbal Case. "Case transmission" or "Case transfer" analyses are rejected.

Chapters four, five, and six extend the analysis in different directions. Chapter four takes English into account and defends a unified analysis of Norwegian and English passives. Chapter five examines different cases of passivization failure in Norwegian and concludes that ergativity is quite close to being both a necessary and sufficient condition for passivization failure. Chapter six examines an interesting difference as to the scope of movement in passive and ergative constructions in Norwegian and concludes that there is probably a syntactic level "beneath" D-structure — a level that collects "subtrees" that subsequently may be combined to form full D-structure tree representations.

This book is a quite substantially revised version of my doctoral dissertation (Åfarli 1989b) from the University of Trondheim. I would like to thank the members of my committee, Lars Hellan, Knut Tarald Taraldsen, and Anders Holmberg, for their co-operation and attacks. Lars Hellan also deserves special thanks for being an excellent supervisor. Three other people deserve special mention, too: Kirsti Koch Christensen, who gave me very useful comments in the final stages of the work with my dissertation, and my syntactic colleagues Lars Johnsen and Anneliese Pitz at the University of Trondheim. I also want to mention The Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities (NAVF), whose funding made it possible for me to write my dissertation.

At various stages, several persons have commented on or otherwise helped me with parts of the present work. Beside the persons already mentioned, I would like to thank Arild Hestvik, Joan Maling, Rita Manzini, Torbjørn Nordgård, Jamal Ouhalla, Christer Platzack, Ian Roberts, Helge Sandøy, Halldór Sigurðsson, and Maria Luisa Zubizarreta. I have also had the opportunity to present parts of my work at various conferences and workshops; experiences that always generated valuable comments.

As my dissertation evolved into a book, four other people have been of invaluable help. I want to thank Werner Abraham, the editor of the present book series, for his patience and encouragement. Also, two anonymous referees made invaluable suggestions that made me completely rewrite quite considerable parts of the original manuscript. And Sandra Foldvik looked at my English, also paying attention to what is actually said in the book.

Specific comments to a work is one thing, the setting of the work is another. I would like to thank my family, the Scandinavian community of linguists, the people in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Trondheim, and people in the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics at University College London for often creating stimulating conditions for work while I was working on my dissertation. The same applies to people in the Department of Translation Studies at Agder College, and to people in the Department of Scandinavian Languages and

Literature at the University of Trondheim, where I have been during the often painful stages of the revision of my work.

The ideas in parts of the present work have been made public before. Chapters four and six are revised versions of Åfarli (1989a) and (1987), respectively. I am grateful to the MIT Press for permission to include a version of the former in the present work.

Tor A. Åfarli

Note on spelling in example sentences:

Norwegian has two closely related official written standards, called Nynorsk (used by about 17% of the population) and Bokmål (used by the rest). These two standards do not correspond closely to dialects or dialect groups of the spoken language (which are abundant in Norwegian), and it is appropriate to consider them as different ways of encoding essentially the same spoken language. Most of the example sentences in this book are written in the Nynorsk standard, but occasionally Bokmål is used. In the latter case the sentence is marked "(B)". Nynorsk examples are usually not marked at all or they are marked "(N)". Nothing substantial is involved in this switch between written standards. Bokmål might for instance be used if it is the only standard that permits the use of a certain verb that it is convenient to use to illustrate a certain syntactic property. But it does not necessarily imply that an example written in Nynorsk could not have been used to illustrate the same point; it only implies that it is more convenient to use Bokmål in that particular case.

