

Passives, impersonals and Voice in Sakha

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Topic: Passives (1) and impersonals (2) in Sakha, a Turkic language spoken in Yakutia:

- (1) chaasky aljat-**ilyn**-na.
cup break-PASS-PST.3SG
'The cup was broken.'

- (2) massyyna-nnan ikki suukka-nnan tijj-**ill**-er.
car-INS two day-INS arrive-PASS-AOR.3SG
'One arrives by car in two days.'

- Previous work has diverged on whether to analyze (1) and (2) as syntactically distinct constructions (Tan and Köhler 2020) or not (Vinokurova 2005, Baker and Vinokurova 2010, Ebata 2013).
- Today we report a new variety that behaves differently from those recorded with regard to passives and impersonals.

- We demonstrate that in this variety, the impersonal should be analyzed as an active construction with a null impersonal pronoun rather than a passive construction.
- We also discuss the implications of the findings for theories of passives (Collins 2005, Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, Alexiadou et al. 2015) and the typology of Voice (Legate et al. 2020).

- ① Literature on Sakha passives and impersonals
- ② Legate et al.'s 2020 analysis of Turkish passives and impersonals
- ③ Basic properties of passives in the current variety
- ④ Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety
- ⑤ Conclusion and implications

- ① **Literature on Sakha passives and impersonals**
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Passive morphome: *-ilin*

Vowel harmony with regard to backness and roundness.

Preceding tense, aspect, agreement.

(3) min tut-**ulun**-num. (Tan and Köhler 2020:141)

1SG catch-PASS-PST.1SG

'I was caught.'

(4) sulus eh-**ilin**-ne. (Tan and Köhler 2020:142)

star explode-PASS-PST.3SG

'The star was exploded.'

(5) sir ahāt-**yll**-ar. (Tan and Köhler 2020:145)

earth feed-PASS-AOR.3SG

'The earth is fed.'

Passive morpheme: *-ilin*

-illi- when followed by non-alveolar consonant; *n-* insertion when preceded by vowel:

- (6) a. min tut-**ullu**-but-un (Tan and Köhler 2020:141)
1SG catch-PASS-PTPL-1SG
'I was caught.'
- b. min sie-**nilli**-bit-im.
1SG eat-PASS-PTPL-1SG
'I was eaten.'

-(n)ill when followed by vowel:

- (7) kiliep sie-**nill**-er. (Tan and Köhler 2020:142)
bread eat-PASS-APR.3SG
'Bread is eaten.'

Passivization: Attaching PASS, agent suppression, no *by*-phrase
(Vinokurova 2005, Baker and Vinokurova 2010, Ebata 2013).

- (8) a. min oloppoh-u aljat-ty-m. (Vinokurova 2005:285)
1SG chair-ACC break-PST-1SG
'I broke the chair.'
- b. chaasky aljat-**lyn**-na. (Vinokurova 2005:336)
cup break-PASS-PST.3SG
'The cup was broken.'

Passivization: The theme *can* be marked ACC (Vinokurova 2005, Baker and Vinokurova 2010, Ebata 2013).

- (9) chaasky(-ny) aljat-**yn**-na. (Vinokurova 2005:336)
cup(-ACC) break-PASS-PST.3SG
'The cup was broken.'

Vinokurova 2005: *syntactic passive*

Ebata 2013: *impersonal passive*

Passive without ACC theme vs. passive with ACC theme: The former does not allow purposive clauses, agent-oriented adverbs, and instrumental phrases; the latter does (Vinokurova 2005: 336).

- (10) a. *chaasky sorujan eotyje-nen aljat-ylyn-na.
cup intentionally hammer-INS break-PASS-PST.3SG
'The cup was intentionally broken with a hammer.'
- b. chaasky-ny sorujan eotyje-nen
cup-ACC intentionally hammer-INS
aljat-ylyn-na.
break-PASS-PST.3SG
'The cup was intentionally broken with a hammer.'

Passive vs. active impersonal (Tan and Köhlert 2020)

- Unaccusative verbs cannot be passivized but can become impersonal.

(12) a. ***kini-ler** massyyna-nnan ikki suukka-nnan
3-PL car-INS two day-INS
tiiǰ-ill-e-**ler**
arrive-PASS-AOR-3PL

Intended: 'They are reached by car in two days.' (Passive)

b. massyyna-nnan ikki suukka-nnan tiiǰ-ill-**er**
car-INS two day-INS arrive-PASS-AOR.3SG
'One arrives (there) by car in two days.' (Impersonal)
(Tan and Köhlert 2020:146)

Passive vs. active impersonal (Tan and Köhlert 2020)

- The agent must be human in impersonals.

(13) *kyhyn keot-ull-er (Tan and Köhlert 2020:146)
winter fly-PASS-AOR.3SG

Intended: 'In winter, one flies.' (Birds)

- Impersonals but not passives allow agent-oriented adverbs like *sorujan* 'intentionally'.
- The matrix clause of an ECM construction may be impersonal but not passive.
- Impersonal argument can control PRO; promoted theme in passive cannot.

Passive vs. active impersonal (Tan and Köhlert 2020)

	Passive	Impersonal
by-phrase	✗	✗
instrumental	✓	✓
transitive verb with ACC object	✓(NOM theme)	✓(ACC theme)
unaccusative verb	✗	✓
human agent requirement	✗	✓
agent-oriented adverb	✗	✓
ECM	✗	✓
control PRO	✗	✓

Table: Passive vs. impersonal in Sakha

Literature on Sakha passives and impersonals

Passive vs. active impersonal (Tan and Köhlert 2020)

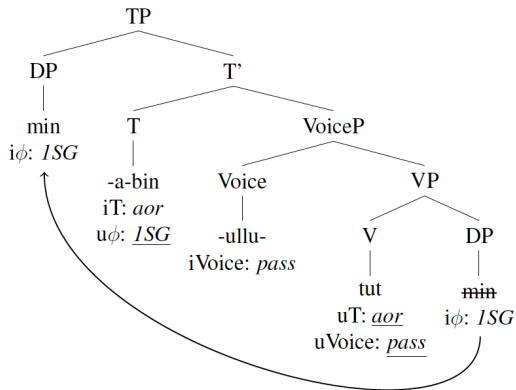


Figure: Passive (Tan and Köhlert 2020:149)

Literature on Sakha passives and impersonals

Passive vs. active impersonal (Tan and Kühlert 2020)

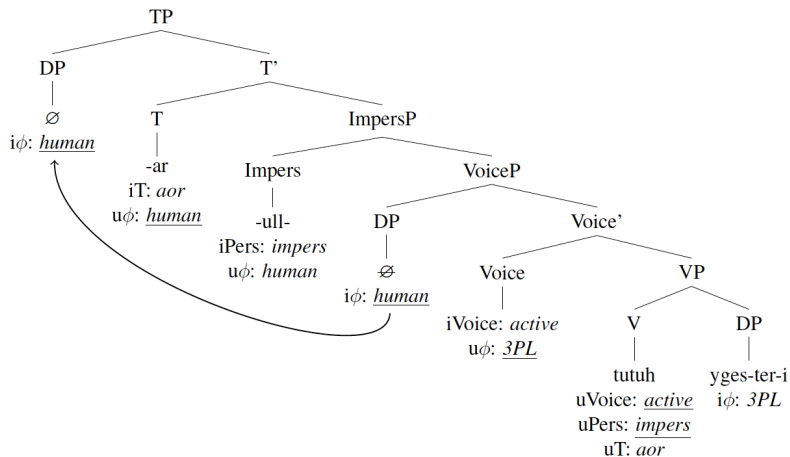


Figure: Impersonal (Tan and Kühlert 2020:149)

Passive vs. active impersonal (Tan and Köhlert 2020)

- PASS cannot stack to create impersonal of passive: ImpersP and VoiceP as iterated VoiceP of different flavors.

- (14) a. ??qos-ko yeoret-**ill-ill**-er.
room-DAT teach-PASS-PASS-AOR.3SG
'In the room, one has to be taught.'
- b. ??ilim-inen tut-**ull-ull**-ar.
net-INS catch-PASS-PASS-AOR.3SG
'One is caught in a net.'

(Tan and Köhlert 2020:150)

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Turkish passives and impersonals

Legate, Akkuş, Šereikaitė and Ringe 2020:

	Passive	Impersonal
agent-oriented adverb	✓	✓
by-phrase	✓	✗
transitive verb with ACC object	✓	✗
transitive verb with oblique object	✗	✓
unergative verb	✗	✓
unaccusative verb	✗	✓
CP-taking verb	✗	✓
human agent requirement	✗	✓
control	✗	✓
depictives	✗	✓
DP wh-remnant in sluicing	✗	✓
...		

Table: Passive vs. impersonal in Turkish

Legate, Akkuş, Šereikaitė and Ringe 2020: Impersonal of passive - ImpersP and VoiceP are distinct projections.

- (15) a. bu oda-da döv-ül-ün-ür.
this room-LOC beat-PASS-PASS-AOR
'One is beaten in this room.'
- b. harp-te vur-ul-un-ur.
war-LOC shoot-PASS-PASS-AOR
'One is shot in the war.'

(Özkaragöz 1986:77)

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Basic properties of passives in the current variety

Active passive alternation:

- Theme loses ACC.
- Agent is suppressed. No by-phrase.
- Verb agrees with theme.

Theme becomes grammatical subject.

- (16) a. min kuerchekh-ter(-i) on'or-dum.
1SG dessert-PL-ACC make-PST.1SG
'I made desserts.'
- b. kuerchekh-ter(-*i) on'oh-ullu-but-tara.
dessert-PL-ACC make-PASS-PTPL-3PL
'Desserts were made.'

✓ Agent-oriented adverb:

- (17) a. suruk-tar **eoideookh-tuk** sur-ullu-but-tara.
letter-PL clever-ADV write-PASS-PTPL-3PL
'The letters were written cleverly.'
- b. chaasky **sorujan** aljat-ylyn-na.
cup on.purpose break-PASS-PST
'The cup was broken on purpose.'

✓Instrument:

- (18) tirii-ler elbekh **khacchu-nnan** atyylah-yly-byt-tara.
leather-PL a.lot.of money-INS buy-PASS-PTPL-3PL
'The leathers were bought with a lot of money.'

The presence of a thematic Voice (Bruening 2013, Alexiadou et al. 2015).

Basic properties of passives in the current variety

✓ Depictive:

- (19) suruk **sitirik** sur-ullu-but-a.
letter drunk write-PASS-PTPL-3SG
'The letter was written drunk.'

Different from Turkish (Legate et al. 2020), but theoretically not surprising.

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Argument: The impersonal is an active construction with a null impersonal pronoun, rather than a passive construction.

Passives and impersonals are in complementary distribution.

- Transitive verbs taking ACC object: only passives.
- Verb lacking a structurally case-marked object: only impersonals (unaccusatives, unergatives, CP-taking verbs, verbs taking oblique case objects).

Verbs with ACC object: *ACC on theme - only passives.

- (20) a. kuerchekh-ter(-*i) on'oh-ullu-but-tara.
dessert-PL-ACC make-PASS-PTPL-3PL
'Desserts were made.'
- b. kuerche5(-*i) on'oh-ullu-but-a.
dessert-ACC make-PASS-PTPL-3SG
'A dessert was made.'
- c. chaasky(-*ny) aljat-ylyn-na.
cup-ACC break-PASS-PST.3SG
'The cup was broken.'

Verbs without ACC object: only impersonals.

Test 1

Generic vs. existential reading

'I don't know (by) who' continuation: requires existential reading.

- Agent in passives: an existential reading. ✓ continuation
- Agent/theme in impersonals: typically as non-specific indefinite 'one'.
continuation

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

Passive:

- (21) kuerchech son'oh-ullu-but-a, min bil-bep-pin
dessert make-PASS-PTPL-3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG
kim-inen.
who-INS

'The dessert was made, but I don't know by who.'

- (22) tirii atyylah-ylly-byt-a, min bil-bep-pin
leather buy-PASS-PTPL-3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG
kim-inen.
who-INS

'The leather was bought, but I don't know by who.'

Impersonal:

- (23) ulakhan kihi byhyty-nan olus kuuske
big person shape-INS very hard
ulele-nill-er, #min bil-bep-pin kim.
work-PASS-AOR.3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG who
'As an adult, one works very hard, #but I don't know who.'
[Unergative]
- (24) kyhyn muus-ka okht-ull-ar, #min
winter ice-DAT fall-PASS-AOR.3SG 1SG
bil-bep-pin kim.
know-NEG-AOR.1SG who
'In winter, one falls on the ice, #but I don't know who.'
[Unaccusative]

Test 2

Human restriction

The impersonal pronoun must be [+human] (e.g., Cinque 1988, Egerland 2003a,b).

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

Passive:

- (25) oiuur-ga kini ytyr-yllyn-na.
forest-DAT 3SG bite-PASS-PST.3SG
'He was bitten in the forest.'

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

Impersonal:

- (26) *oiuur-ga dyygynaa-nyll-ar.
forest-DAT buzz-PASS-AOR.3SG

Intended: 'In the forest, one buzzes.' (Mosquito) [Unergative]

- (27) *kuhun tuh-ill-er.
autumn fall-PASS-AOR.3SG

Intended: 'In autumn, one falls.' (Leaf) [Unaccusative]

Test 3

Wh-remnant in sluicing

Voice matching is required in sluicing (e.g., Merchant 2001).

- Passive: by-phrase, denoted by the instrumental case in Sakha.
- Impersonal: DP, indicating an active Voice.

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

Passive:

- (28) kuerchech son'oh-ullu-but-a, min bil-bep-pin
dessert make-PASS-PTPL-3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG
kim*(-inen).
who-INS

'The dessert was made, but I don't know by who.'

- (29) tirii atyylah-ylly-byt-a, min bil-bep-pin
leather buy-PASS-PTPL-3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG
kim*(-inen).
who-INS

'The leather was bought, but I don't know by who.'

Impersonal:

The impersonal pronoun can also have an arbitrary interpretation 'someone, some people' when it serves as the thematic subject and occurs with specific time reference, a phenomenon that has been attested cross-linguistically with impersonals (e.g., Cinque 1988, Egerland 2003a,b, Fenger 2018).

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

Impersonal:

- (30) ystan-ylyn-na, min bil-bep-pin kim(-*inen).
jump-PASS-PST 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG who-INS
'Someone jumped, but I don't know who.' [Unergative]
- (31) seotyeole-nylyn-ne, min bil-bep-pin kim(-*inen).
swim-PASS-PST.3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG who-INS
'Someone swam, but I don't know who.' [Unergative]

Impersonal:

- (32) [bihigi ostuol-u alja-p-pyp-pytyn]
1PL table-ACC break-CAUS-PTPL-1PL
bil-ilin-ne, min bil-bep-pin kim(-*inen).
know-PASS-PST.3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG who-INS
'People knew we broke the table, but I don't know who.'
[CP-taking verb]

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

Impersonal:

- (33) uol-ga keomeoleoh-ulun-ne, min bil-bep-pin
boy-DAT help-PASS-PST.3SG 1SG know-NEG-AOR.1SG
kim(-*inen).
who-INS

'Someone helped the boy, but I don't know who.' [Verb with oblique object]

- (34) iti kun'-n'e khaia-5a un'-ulun-ne, min
this day-DAT mountain-DAT pray-PASS-PST.3SG 1SG
bil-bep-pin kim(-*inen).
know-NEG-AOR.1SG who-INS

'On this day, someone prayed to the mountain, but I don't know who.' [Verb with oblique object]

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

	Passive	Impersonal
transitive verb with ACC object	✓	✗
transitive verb with oblique object	✗	✓
unergative verb	✗	✓
unaccusative verb	✗	✓
CP-taking verb	✗	✓
generic interpretation	✗	✓
human agent requirement	✗	✓
DP wh-remnant in sluicing	✗	✓

Table: Passive vs. impersonal in the current Sakha variety

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

✓ Impersonal of passive: ImpersP and VoiceP as distinct projections.

- (35) serii-ge yt-yll-yll-ar.
war-DAT shoot-PASS-PASS-AOR.3SG
'In war, one is shot.'
- (36) oiuur-ga ytyr-yll-yll-ar.
forest-DAT bite-PASS-PASS-AOR.3SG
'In the forest, one is bitten.'

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

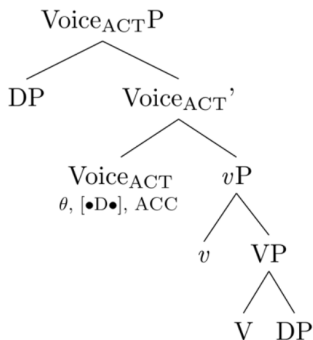


Figure: Active construction

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

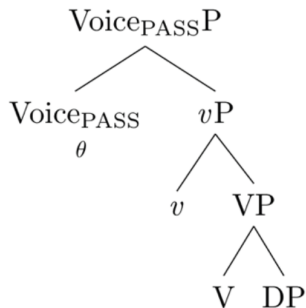


Figure: Passive in the current Sakha variety

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

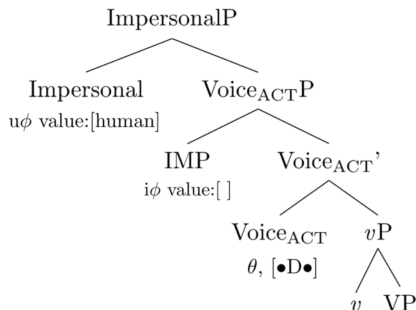


Figure: Impersonal where the verb has a thematic subject

Impersonal head selects for a VoiceP that lacks accusative case assignment (Legate et al. 2020).

Impersonal pronoun is licensed through Agreement (McCloskey 2007, Legate et al. 2020).

Passives vs. impersonals in the current variety

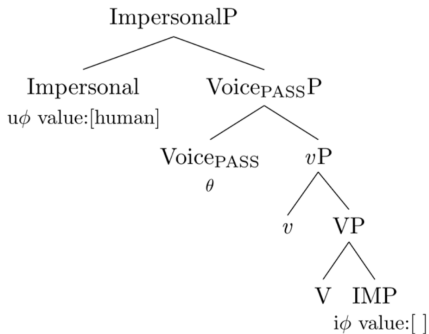


Figure: Unaccusative impersonal and impersonal of passive

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Conclusion

- The PASS morpheme is shared by two syntactically distinct constructions: passive constructions, and impersonal constructions.
- The passive agent: existential interpretation, may be non-human, 'by'-phrase remnant in sluicing, agent of a transitive verb that takes a structurally case-marked object.
- The impersonal argument: can have a generic reading, must be human, DP remnant in sluicing, only occurs with verbs that lack an ACC object.
- The passive agent is demoted; the impersonal argument is a syntactically projected null impersonal pronoun.

- Our data support passive theories that view passive as involving agent suppression (Bruening 2013, Legate 2014, Alexiadou et al. 2015), and challenge the theories which claim that the agent in passive is syntactically realized as the thematic subject (Collins 2005).
- The fact that the PASS morpheme can stack to produce an impersonal of passive suggests ImpersonalP and VoiceP are different projections (Legate et al. 2020) rather than the same projection with different flavors, assuming VoiceP cannot recurse.

Remaining questions

- The reciprocal word *beiebeieleri* 'each other' is an anaphor that requires a syntactic binder. Why are passives with the dative reciprocal accepted?

(37) **beiebeieleri* tut-ullu-but-a/tara.

each.other catch-PASS-PTPL-3SG/3PL

'Each other was/were caught.'

(38) kuerchekh *beiebeieleri-ger* son'oh-ullu-but-a.

dessert each.other-DAT make-PASS-PTPL-3SG

'A dessert was made for each other.'

- By-phrase.
- Language variation among Sakha speakers.

Thank you!

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Appendix 1: Passivization for ditransitive verbs

The dative object must retain its dative case:

- (39) min tabaarys*(-par) kinige-ler
1SG friend-1SG.POSS.DAT book-PL
ber-illi-bit-tere/*e.
give-PASS-PTPL-3PL/3SG
'Books were given to my friend.'

✓ Depictives in impersonals:

- (40) kanikul-lar-ga itirik tij-ill-er.
holiday-PL-DAT drunk arrive-PASS-AOR.3SG
'On holidays, one arrives (there) drunk.'

Appendix 3: Reciprocal

beiebeieleri 'each other' is not a logophor, but an anaphor that requires a syntactic binder (e.g., Charnavel 2019).

- (41) [Masha uonna Aiaana]_i ereideekh-ter! *kini-ler_i
Masha and Aiaana poor-PL 3-PL
iye-ler-e kuerche5-i beiebeieleri-ger_i
mother-PL-POSS dessert-ACC each.other-DAT
on'or-uokh-tara suo5a.
make-FUT-3PL NEG.FUT
'Poor [Masha and Aiaana]_i! *Their_i mothers won't make a dessert
for each other_i.'

Appendix 3: Reciprocal

✓ *beiebeieleri* in impersonals:

- (42) *beiebeieleri-ger ulele-nill-er.*
each.other-DAT work-PASS-AOR.3SG
'People work for each other.' [Unergative]
- (43) *serii-ge beiebeieleri-ger okht-ull-ar.*
war-DAT each.other-DAT fall-PASS-AOR.3SG
'In war, people fall for each other.' [Unaccusative]

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