

On some (event) structural properties of the English *get*-passive

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This paper presents a new analysis of the structure and event interpretation of English *get*-passives. We show the participle in the *get*-passive (1a) realizes the same structure and properties as the participle found in the *be*-passive (1b). We propose the structures of (1a-b) differ only in that *get* realizes in an ‘anticausative’ structure which embeds the participle XP; the *be*-passive lacks this extra structure. Most of the paper explores two consequences of this analysis. The first is that the *get*-passive and *be*-passive differ in event structure. A second is that the *get*-passive and *get*-causative (1c) share an event structure, the latter differing only from the former in introducing an additional Agent argument (cp. Haegeman 1985).

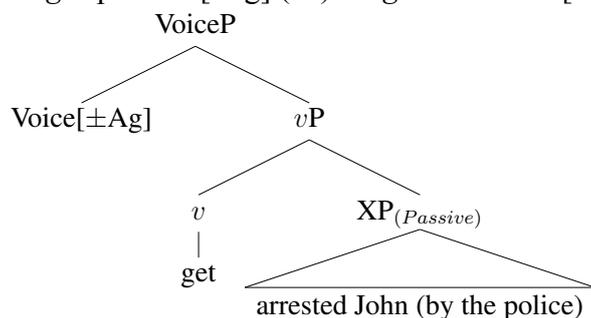
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| (1) a. John got [arrested by the police] | <i>Get</i> -passive |
| b. John was [arrested by the police] | <i>Be</i> -passive |
| c. Mary got John arrested by the police. | <i>Get</i> -causative |

The first component of the analysis concerns the complement of *get*, the participle XP. Building on almost all recent work on the *get*-passive (especially Reed 2011), we adopt the view that typical participle complements of *get* (e.g. (1a)) are in fact eventive (*contra* Fox & Grodzinsky 1996 a.m.o.): Evidence includes the fact that ditransitive participles license both Theme and Recipient complements (2) (unlike ‘adjectival’/stative participles, which obey the Sole Complement Generalization). Absent evidence to the contrary, the participle XP complement of *get* has the same syntax and semantics as the *be*-passive participle.

- (2) a. The customers got sold the cars./The cars got sold to the customers.
 b. The carrots got fed to the babies. / The babies got fed the carrots.

Instead, we posit the difference between the *get*-passive and *be*-passive is ‘high’ in the clause. On this analysis, *get* itself realizes a light verb *v*, embedded under a VoiceP; *v* takes the participle XP as its complement (3). In the *get*-passive, VoiceP does not project a specifier (Voice[-Ag]); in the *get*-causative VoiceP does license an Agent (Voice[+Ag]). As such, the *get*-passive structure (1a) relates directly to that of *get*-causatives (1b), with the *get*-passive an “anticausative alternant” of the *get*-causative (cp. Haegeman 1985).

- (3) The *get*-passive [-Ag] (1a) vs. *get*-causative [+Ag] (1c) structural alternation



The event interpretation of the *get*-passive then follows from the composition of *get* (itself eventive) with its complement XP (also eventive). The *get* component is interpreted as an event e_1 that produces or brings about an eventuality e_2 , e_2 introduced with eventive passive participle. We refer to this relation as IC, (informally) “Indirect Causation” (4) (see especially Neeleman and van de Koot 2012) for caution on this label).

- (4) [[*get* XP]] = IC(e_1, e_2)

The syntactic/semantic analysis in (3)-(4) is controversial because it predicts that the event structure of the *get*-passive differs from the *be*-passive; however previous literature has identified only limited aspectual differences between the two (Alexiadou 2012). We show in fact there are systematic differences, differences that follow from our analysis.

As illustration, careful manipulation of a class of adjuncts called “By-M(anner)M(eans)” (by-MM) produces a clear difference with *get*- and *be*-passives (5):

- (5) a. The liver got/*was pounded along with the cutlets [by being left on the wrong board]
b. The pencils got/*were broken [by being too long for the case].

By-MM supplies a Manner/Means by which an event unfolds; importantly, its distribution is sensitive only to properties of events (and not of participants) (Dowty 1979, Sæbø 2007). In (5a), *by*-MM is incompatible with the event the passive participle describes: it is implausible to construe *being left on the wrong board* as the MM of pounding. However, *being left on the wrong board* can be understood as the MM of an event that brings about a pounding; its acceptability with *get* follows if *by*-MM in (5a) modifies a prior-to-pounding event introduced by the *get* structure, that is absent in the *be* structure, as in (4). Similarly, *being too long for the case* in (5b) cannot modify the participle breaking event, so is not possible with *be*; but can modify a non-specified (bringing about) event, so is fine with *get*.

A second consequence of our structure in (3) is that it means that the *get*-passive and *get*-causative describe the same set of events, differing only in the number of NP arguments they introduce. Previous work argues against this on the grounds that the *get*-passive does not exhibit properties expected of causatives (see discussion in Brownlow 2011). We argue that in fact *get* clauses (in general) simply involve a different type of causation, as in our (3); it is for this reason that *get* does not have the same semantics (or syntax) of ‘causation’ found in e.g. *make*, *whit-en*, or lexical causatives like *melt* (*contra* Brownlow 2011, McIntyre 2012). We apply a battery of standard diagnostics of causative syntax/semantics to the *get*-‘causative’ to show that this is the case (6). For example, we show: *get* does not license *from* Causer phrases (6a); *get* does not license natural force NPs as subjects (6c); and that fact XPs can function as “causers” of *get* /the IC relation, but not of other causatives in English (6c).

- (6) a. Mary got John arrested *[from the secret documents].
b. *[The storm] got the shipwreck debris blown to shore.
c. [The faulty seals on the bags] got/*made Mary arrested by the police.

We therefore propose a unified analysis, in which *get* realizes a non-specified event (*e1*) in both *get* causatives and passives.

In conclusion, we note that most previous work on *get* focuses on *be/get* ‘contrasts’ like (7). These are tests for participants, rather than direct tests that isolate event structure (see Reed (2011) for overview of such participant-related tests). (7), for example, involves the referent of the PRO of a Rationale Clauses (RC) (Fox and Grodzinsky 1996 et seq.):

- (7) The ship was/*got sunk [PRO to collect the insurance money]. (*Reported judgement*)

The PRO in the RC in (6) is said to identify an implicit external argument of the *be*-passive, but not of the *get* passive; such that *be*-passive participles are ‘larger’ than the *get*-passive participle. Yet recent work on RCs with *be*-passives shows that the (non-obligatory) control relation is in no way a reliable indicator of an ‘implicit argument’ in the *be*-passive (Landau 2010, 2017); rather, NOC PRO interacts with context sensitive interpretations of a ‘Responsible Party’.