

The passive in Persian

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1 Introduction

In his typological study of passive constructions, Keenan (1985) states that if a language has any passives, it has 'basic passives'; that is, passives formed with a past participle and auxiliary. This paper analyses the occurrence of such constructions in Modern Persian. It provides an overview of the syntax of passive formation from the perspective of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG), before going on to identify some of the semantic and pragmatic issues involved.

2 LFG and the passive in Persian

Bresnan (1982) argues that the systematic relationship between actives and their corresponding passives can be expressed by a universal lexical rule: for any active lexical entry for a stem which mentions SUBJ and OBJ functions, a passive construction based on the same stem will replace SUBJ with an oblique-object function, and OBJ with SUBJ. This process can be demonstrated with the following active and corresponding passive sentences in Persian:

- (1) Hasan sag-hā-rā košt-0
 Hasan dog-PL-DO killed-3SG
 'Hasan killed the dogs.'
- (2) sag-hā tavassot-e Hasan košt-e šod-and
 dog-PL by.means-of Hasan killed-PTC became-3PL
 'The dogs were killed by Hasan.'

Note three pieces of evidence that the OBJ has become subject: it has lost its *-rā* accusative marking; gained zero marking¹; and got agreement on the verb. On an LFG analysis, the agent *Hasan* is effectively demoted from subject position, an impression strengthened by the fact that it can be omitted entirely:

- (3) sag-hā košt-e šod-and
 dog-PL killed-PTC became-3PL
 'The dogs were killed.'

However, although the agent may be omitted, it is still implicitly present; so, for example, it cannot be explicitly denied, nor can it be replaced by a phrase such as *xod be xod* 'gratuitously':

- (4) * sag košt-e šod-0 bedun-e inke kasi
 dog killed-PTC became-3SG without-EZ that someone
- in kār-rā kard-e bāš-ad.
 this task-DO did-PTC SBJ.be-3SG
 'The dog was killed without anyone doing it.'

¹ Indefinite or non-salient objects may also receive zero-marking in Persian; but the object in this example is definite and salient.

- (5) * sag xod be xod koš-e šod-0
 dog self to self killed-PTC became-3SG
 'The dog was killed gratuitously'

If therefore seems to make more sense to speak of suppression rather than deletion of the agent, an intuition reflected by the Persian name for this passive construction, *siqe-e majhul* 'unknown agent'.

In simple terms LFG, which adopts a relational rather than configurational approach to universal grammar, could characterise the remapping of such predicative relations as follows:

- (6)
- | | | | | |
|---------------|--|-------------------|--|----------------|
| <i>active</i> | $\text{PRED} < x \quad y >$ | \leftrightarrow | $\text{PRED} < x \quad y >$ | <i>passive</i> |
| | $\left \begin{array}{c} s \\ 0 \end{array} \right $ | | $\left \begin{array}{c} s \\ 0 \end{array} \right $ | |
| | | | (OBL) s | |

This shows that the active and passive verb forms share the same predicate argument structure; but the roles may be mapped to different sets of grammatical functions. Hence the fact that the actor and undergoer are in different positions in their respective active and passive sentences in Persian is not a result of their being subject to movement rules in between some abstract 'deep structure' and the surface structure; rather, the apparent movement is an epiphenomenon of the configurational structure of Persian interacting with principles of completeness (every function designated by a PRED must be present in the f-structure of that PRED) and coherence (every argument function in an f-structure must be designated by a PRED).

In Lexical Mapping Theory, these principles are restated in terms of the restrictiveness and objectiveness of thematic roles. We set out below some relevant rules and conditions, taken from Bresnan (2002:307-311):

- (7) *Thematic Hierarchy*
 agent > beneficiary > experiencer/goal > instrument > patient/theme > locative
- (8) *Logical Subject*, θ :
 θ designates the most prominent semantic role of a predicator.
- (9) *The Subject Condition*:
 Every predicator must have a subject.
- (10) *Passive*:
 θ |
 |
 \emptyset :

² This symbol signifies that the most prominent semantic role (θ) cannot be mapped onto a syntactic argument in the f-structure; it is, however, still linkable to an argument adjunct (e.g. PPP).

Together, these principles help to explain the formation of the passive in terms of the features of the various arguments involved: [+P], determining whether a syntactic function is *unrestricted* (subjects and objects) as to its semantic role; and [+ θ], determining whether a syntactic function is *non-oblique* (subjects and obliques) in that it may complement intransitive predicators such as N or A. It follows that a [- θ] role cannot be mapped onto an object, whereas a [-P] role can be mapped onto a subject or object. This is developed further in section (4) below.

3 Passivisation: lexical or syntactic?

A structure-preserving rule may exist between two constructions if both can be generated by the rules of the base; one's morphological forms are predictable from those of the other; and the co-occurrence restrictions in one are predictable from those in the other. A number of linguists have argued on this basis that derivational rules such as dative shift and the 'basic passive' in English are lexical in nature. Wasow (1976) lists a number of criteria which, if fulfilled in combination, provide strong evidence that a given rule is lexical. In particular, and relevant to the process of passivisation in Persian, he notes that:

- 1. Lexical rules may relate items of different grammatical categories, whereas transformational rules cannot change node labels.³*

'May' is an important word here: lexical rules do not have to change node labels either. For example, one instance of causative formation in Persian is a morphological process ascribable to a lexical rule which changes an active verb into a causative verb (so involving no change in grammatical category):

- (11) mi-res-ad
 PROG-arrive-3SG
 'He arrives.'
- (12) salām mi-res-ān-ad
 greetings PROG-arrive-CAUS-3SG
 'He brings greetings.'

However, there is good evidence that for past participles with a passive sense, a change of grammatical category is involved:

- (13)(a) (i) pirāhan-e šik
 shirt-EZ trendy
- (ii) mard-e besār biadab
 man-EZ extremely rude
- (b) (i) pirāhan-e farsud-e
 shirt-EZ worn out-PTC
- (ii) mard-e besār ašoft-e
 man-EZ extremely disturbed-PTC
- (14) (a) ketāb-e jāleb-tar
 book-EZ interesting-COMPAR

³ Some of the following evidence is adapted from Burjasteh (1983:142-9).

- (b) ketāb-e farsud-e-tar
book-EZ battered-PTC-COMPAR

(13a) and (b) show that, like adjectives, passive participles may appear in the normal post-nominal adjectival position; and may be adverbially modified by (e.g.) *beštār* 'extremely'. (14)(a) and (b) show that, like normal adjectives, some passive participles may be modified by the comparative suffix (this is also true of the superlative suffix *-tārīn*). Hence a change of node label from verb to adjective does seem to be involved.

ii. *Lexical rules may have idiosyncratic exceptions, or be unpredictable in some other way.*

Bargsteh notes a number of verbs from which passive participles may be derived to form nominals with unpredictable meanings:

- (15) *kuffan* 'to beat' → *kuff-e* 'minced meatballs'
kešīdan 'to pull' → *kešīd-e* 'slap'
didan 'to see' → *did-e* 'sight; eye'

Verbs are lexically specified for whether or not they can be passivised⁴, even though they may take two syntactic arguments in their active forms (e.g. (18b)). Where they cannot, an alternative means of 'agent-suppression' must be found, such as an impersonal third-person plural subject:

- (16) *did-e* *šod-0*
seen-PTC became-3SG
'It was seen.'

- (17) **goft-e* *šod-0*
said-PTC became-3SG
'It was said.'

- (18)a *goft-and*
said-3PL
'It was said/They said.'

- b. *ānhā chi goft-and?*
they what said-3PL
'What did they say?'

On the basis of the evidence above it seems reasonable to conclude that the passive is formed by a lexical rule in Persian. However, the passive [participle + auxiliary verb] unit behaves in many ways analogously to compound verb units, and these raise some problems for a lexicalist account.

4 The passive and compound verbs

Sadeghi (1993:241) reports that a maximum of one hundred and fifteen simple verbs are in use in Modern Persian; all the rest are compounds. It is notable that compound

⁴ In section 5 it will also be shown that verbs must admit a [+volition] reading in order to be passivisable.

verb phrases manifest some properties which suggest they are derived via a lexical process, and others which suggest a syntactic derivation.

Key arguments for the former include the fact that compound verb phrases carry a single, primary stress on the final syllable of the preverbal element (excluding inflectional endings):

- (19) *zamtN xord-0*
ground ate-3SG
'He fell down.'

- (20) *xejālAT kešīd-am*
shame drew-1SG
'I was ashamed.'

Secondly, compound verbs may be nominalised and used to form adjectives and adverbs:

- (21) *lebās-nā-ye xošk-šod-e*
dress-PL-EZ dry-became-PTC
'the dried clothes'

- (22) *Hamīd šenākonān be xoški*
Hamīd while swimming to dry land
Hamīd reached land swimming. reached-3SG

Thirdly, compound verbs resist separation by adverbs and (usually) direct objects:

- (23) *nāme-rā bezudi ersāl kon-id.*
letter-DO soon despatch do IMPER-2PL
'Send the letter!'

- (24) **nāme-rā ersāl bezudi kon-id*
letter-DO despatch soon do IMPER-2PL
soon despatch letter-DO do IMPER-2PL

Conversely, key arguments for the process of compound verb formation deriving from a syntactic rule include the fact that inflectional prefixes (negativizer, imperative/subjunctive, progressive and imperative-negative) attach to the verb stem, thereby intervening between the two parts of the compound:

- (26) *motāvāle ne-mī-šāv-am*
understanding NEG-PROG-become-1SG
'I don't understand.'

The auxiliary of the future tense, the progressive auxiliary and a direct object clitic can intervene:

- (27) *pas-eš xāh-am dād*
back-it-DO will-1SG give
'I will give it back.'

Thirdly, and significantly, the verbal part of the compound may take two pre-verbal elements, which can be coordinated or gapped⁵:

- (28) *sāh-hā* *sāsān-rā* *šenkanje* *va* *azāb*
 year-PL Sasan-DO torture and torment **dād-and**
 'They tortured and tormented Sasan for years.'
 gave-3PL

- (29) *natavānest-am* *harānče* *fēkr* *mī-kard-am* *va*
 NEG-could-1SG whatever think PROG-did-1SG and **ehsās**
 reveal give-1SG
 'I couldn't reveal what I thought and felt.'

boruz dah-am
 reveal give-1SG
 'I couldn't reveal what I thought and felt.'

In most of the examples above, a passive [*participle plus auxiliary*] phrase may be substituted for the compound verb, e.g.:

- (30) *single stress*: *nevEŠT-e* *šod-0*
 wrote-PTC became-3SG
 'It was written.'

- (31) *adjectivization* in *kelid* *peydā šodan-i*
 this key found/become-AFF NEG-is 3SG
 'This key is not to be found.'

- (32)(a) *anli-separation*: *tond tond* *sāxt-e* *šod-and*
 fast fast built-PTC became-3PL
 'They were built rapidly.'

- (b) * *sāxt-e* *tond tond* *šod-and*
 built-PTC fast fast became-3PL

- (33) *separation by some elements*: *košt-e* *na-xāh-am* *šod*
 killed-PTC NEG-will-1SG become
 'I shall not be killed.'

- (34) *coordination*: *natavānest-am* *harānče* *did-e* *va* *šentid-e*
 NEG-could-1SG whatever saw-PTC and heard-PTC

šod-0 *tarānf* *kon-am*
 became-3SG description do-1SG
 'I couldn't describe what had been seen and heard.'

At this point we can conclude that passive verb phrases in Persian, like compound verbs, exhibit both morphological and phrasal properties. The maxim of Occam's razor cautions against positing two passivisation rules, one lexical and the other syntactic, where one would do: and none of the evidence provided above forces a conclusion that two separate rules are in operation. This raises the question: is the passive phrase formed in the lexicon or in the syntax?

⁵ Data from Mejerdoomian (2002).

Ackermann and Lesourd (1997:71) argue that taken together, the *Weak Lexicalist Hypothesis* (all morphological derivation is carried out in the lexicon) and the *Lexical Integrity Principle* (syntactic rules neither analyse nor alter word structure) support a 'Hypothesis of Morphological Lexicalism' with two sets of 'Cherished Beliefs':

- (35)(i) *Information about argument structure, valence and case government is associated exclusively with lexical representations (i.e. semantic, argument and grammatical structure information); and*
 (ii) *Only lexical rules may alter or determine information in these domains.*

- (36)(i) *Only morphological objects may be associated with lexical representations (with the possible exception of phrasal idioms); and*

(ii) *Morphological objects exhibit lexical integrity.*

However, as Ackermann and Lesourd point out, these two sets of beliefs combined lead to something of an analytic paradox when it comes to complex predicate formation. As the Persian data above strongly suggests, the derivation of a passive construction involves the manipulation of lexical information, and so seems to be carried out by lexical rules. But the resulting construct does not display lexical integrity (various elements can intervene, and two passive participles may be coordinated with one auxiliary): hence it cannot be classified as a morphological object, cannot be associated with a lexical representation, and so cannot be formed by lexical rules.

In his treatment of Bantu and Romance causatives, Aisina (1997) moves away from (35) and proposes that although the complex argument structure (a-structure) for causatives in both languages is the same, it is formed in the lexicon for Chichewa but in the syntax for Catalan. This analysis appears successful for languages where a complex predicate is either a synthetic morphological object or an analytic non-morphological object. The difficulties arise – as Ackermann and Lesourd note for Hungarian, and as is equally problematic for Persian – when a complex predicate does not fit neatly into either category.

The way out of this paradox which they propose is to weaken the notion of lexical integrity outlined above in (36) and concede that morphological rules may apply to lexically formed analytic expressions as well as to individual words. How would this work for Persian?

Because passive constructions, although syntactically separable, behave like a unit with respect to morphological derivations, we believe it makes sense to treat them as derived by lexical rules. It is not efficient to propose both syntactic *and* lexical rules of passivisation, nor would it be easy to identify specific cases of one or the other since evidence for both is often combined in the same construction. The ability of past participles with a passive sense to change grammatical category, and their idiosyncratic formation, are both strong pieces of evidence; and in addition, the passive seems to feed other lexical processes such as the formation of derived nominals (e.g. *kufīe*).

In terms of argument structure, *sodan* might be taken to form an incomplete, 'passive' predicate:

- (37) *Passive Argument Structure for sodan*
 [PRED *sodan** <[], []>]
 [-o] [-p]
 | |
 (Obl.) su

This a-structure is incomplete on its own: it requires a second predicate to provide its arguments, the first of which (the original agent) will be suppressed or move to the periphery of the clause while the second becomes the subject of the passive phrase. But how the argument structure of *sodan* combines with another predicate begs the question of how the passive construction relates to the Persian compound verb paradigm.

5 Is *sodan* a 'light verb' in passive constructions?

The description of the verbal part of Persian compound verbs (CVs) as a 'light verb' (LV) should not be taken to imply that such a constituent is semantically empty. Karimi (1997) moves away from her early position (Mohammad & Karimi (1992)) and argues that although LVs are semantically bleached, they are not semantically empty. Meyerdomian (2002) agrees, while noting that they can carry tense, aspect or negation morphology like simple verbs, and each correspond to a 'heavy' or fully thematic verb. We shall make use of the term 'light verb' here because the distinction with 'heavy verbs' is a useful one to make in contrasting the role of *sodan* with that of LVs.

There are a number of close parallels between CVs and the passive construction with *sodan*:

i. *Exhibition of both morphological and phrasal properties.* This has already been discussed above: both passive constructions and CVs carry a single primary stress, may be nominalized, and resist separation by adverbs and (usually) direct objects; but various morphological and syntactic elements may intervene, and one verbal element may combine with two non-verbal elements, which may be coordinated or gapped.

ii. *Provision of TNS and AGR-marking.* LVs carry this for their compounds; so does *sodan* in passives. The past participle is used in all tense inflections of the passive, and is unmarked for agreement.

iii. *Fixed evolution interpretation.* Karimi (1997:295-6) observes that the volitional force of a heavy verb is not necessarily preserved when it enters a CV construction as a light verb, citing the examples below. Both sentences would be grammatical without the word 'intentionally':

- (38) *Kimia amdan dir be kelas amad-0*
Kimia intentionally late to class came-3SG
'Kimia intentionally came to class late.'

⁶ In the sense of Jespersen (1954)

- (39) **Kimia amdan dir be donyā amad-0*
Kimia intentionally late to world came-3SG
 *'Kimia intentionally was born late.'

This loss of volitional force contrasts with the passive construction, which Dabir-Moghaddam (1982:81-84) claims is a governed rule in the sense that it only applies to verbs that can express a volitional act. We may add that this volitional force is preserved under passivisation. So [-volitional] verbs, including *psych*-verbs, may not be passivised ((40) and (41) below), while passive constructions may not be modified by adjectives such as accidentally ((42)):

- (40) **badan-eš az in dāru zaiif kard-e šod-0*
body-his from this drug weak made-PTC became-3SG
 'His body was made weak by this medicine.'
- (41) **Arnin tavassot-e hame tarsid-e šod-0*
Arnin by-EZ everyone feared-PTC became-3SG
 Arnin was feared by everyone.
- (42) **sag-e Mahnaz etefagan košt-e šod-0*
dog-EZ Mahnaz accidentally killed-PTC became-3SG
 'Mahnaz's dog was killed by mistake.'

This feature, then, might be argued to point up a difference between *sodan* and LVs. Other significant differences include:

iv. *Specification of Aktionsart/aspectual information.* It is widely observed in the literature that LV alternations affect the event structure of the CV. Compare, for example, (43)a and b below, or the punctual versus durative senses added to the CV by *gereft* (44) and *kešid* (45) respectively:

- (43) a. *nafas kešidan to take a deep breath*
 b. *nafas zadan to pant*
- (44) *dast-e Daryuš dar yek (sanjve) *sā-at-hā dard gereft-0*
hand-EZ Daryuš in one (second) hour-PL pain got-3SG
 'Daryuš's hand (started to) hurt (in one second / *for hours).
- (45) *Daryuš (*dar yek sanjve/ sā-at-hā) dard kešid-0*
Daryuš (in one second/ hour-PL) pain pulled-3SG
 Daryuš was in pain ('in one second / for hours).

In passive constructions, on the other hand, alternations of this kind are not possible for the simple reason that passives always select the verb *sodan*. This is not to say that the event structure of all passives in Persian is identical, rather that is predominantly dictated by the event structure of the pre-passivised verb or verb phrase.⁷ Moreover, the normal [+inchoative] sense of *sodan* is absent in passives: *košt-e šod* does not mean 'he began to be killed', but 'he was killed'.

⁷ One of Keenan's (1975) passive universals is that 'if a language has any passives, it has ones which can be used for the perfective range of meaning', and it may well be the case that passivisation in Persian commonly carries with it some notion of perfectivity – certainly passives formed with *sodan* with a progressive inflection are extremely uncommon, and arguably marked. But further exploration is beyond the scope of this discussion.

v. *Compound verbs may themselves be passivised*, providing one of the clearest examples of how, as we have just discussed, the pre-passivised phrase may control the final event structure. So for example the event structure of (48) is highly punctual, and not at all inchoative.

- (46) *sal-hā dar zendān* Esi *šekanje dād-e šod-0*
 year-PL in prison Esi torture given-PTC became-3SG
 'For years Esi was tortured in prison.'
- (47) name *ersāl kard-e šod-0*
 letter despatch done-PTC became-3SG
 'The letter was despatched.'
- (48) bomb *lavassot-e nasrīn monfajr kard-e šod-0*
 bomb by-EZ Nasrīn exploded made-EZ became-3SG
 'The bomb was detonated by Nasrīn.'

In some instances, a sentence may be ambiguous between a passive and an inchoative reading. Dabir-Moghaddam (1982:79ff) uses the availability of some compound verbs to passivisation to resolve this ambiguity, commenting on sentences such as:

- (49) a. *āb sard bud-0*
 water cool was-3SG
 'The water was cool.'
- b. *āb sard šod-0*
 water cool became-3SG
 'The water became cool.'
- c. *āb (tavassot-e Mahmud) sard šod-0*
 water by Mahmud cool became-3SG
 'The water was cooled (by Mahmud).'
- d. *āb (lavassot-e Mahmud) sard kard-e šod-0*
 water by Mahmud made-PTC became-3SG
 'The water was made cool (by Mahmud).'

The verb in sentence (a) is a stative, in (b) a straightforward inchoative, and in (d) a passive. But what of (c)? Dabir-Moghaddam proposes that the optional presence of an agent in such sentences proves that that they are actually opaque passives, and have undergone an optional process of 'kardan deletion' (example (48) would also mean much the same without the participle *kard-e*).

In any case the existence of such examples serves to illustrate that the verb *sodan* is not combining with pre-verbal elements such as *monfajr* and *sard* to create a compound verb; rather, it is adding passive force to verbs which are already compound, such as *sard kardan* 'to make cool'.

vI. *A primary function of sodan is 'agent-suppression'*. It is worth noting that the past participle in Persian does not necessarily carry a passive sense in and of itself: in combination with auxiliaries such as *budan* 'to be', for example, a transitive verb will continue to have active voice:

- (50) Rahīm Hasan-rā *zad-e hit-PTC ast is 3SG*
 Rahīm Hasan-DO hit-PTC is 3SG
 'Rahīm has hit Hasan.'
- (51) Rahīm Hasan-rā *zad-e hit-PTC bud-0. was-3SG*
 Rahīm Hasan-DO hit-PTC was-3SG
 'Rahīm had hit Hasan.'
- (52) Hasan *zad-e šod-0. became-3SG*
 Hasan hit-PTC became-3SG
 'Hasan was hit.'

It therefore seems logical to treat *sodan* as an auxiliary, not a light verb. Unlike light verbs it is always specified for [+volitional], and has little of any impact on the Aktionsart class of the event described. Like other auxiliaries, it functions to bear tense and subject-agreement; in addition, it suppresses the agent and promotes the undergoer by reducing by one the number of arguments.

6 The passive, inchoative and 'light verbs' – semantic representation

We have seen that *sodan* in its passive use differs from both inchoatives and light verbs in that it must be [+volitional]; it loses its default inchoative sense; and it suppresses the agent through passivisation. In her article on complex predicates in Urdu, Butt (1997) shows how Urdu light verbs contribute semantic information ([-conscious choice] and [+inception/completion]) to complex predicates. She uses Jackendoff's (1990) theory of Conceptual Semantics to construct an elaborated level of argument structure. In this section the same theory will be applied to the passive in Persian.

Jackendoff's basic analysis of the process of passivisation is straightforward: the external argument-marking index *i* is deleted, and one of the other indices in the verb's conceptual structure is changed to *i* so that this other argument will appear in subject function. Note that the original or 'logical subject' has not been deleted altogether; it is now merely implicit and, as Jackendoff notes, available for binding the subject of the complement in the well-known example 'The ship was sunk to collect the insurance.'⁸

In his terms, a 'heavy' verb with a full lexical specification such as *koštan* 'to kill' might have a simplified lexical conceptual structure (LCS) something like figure (53):

- (53)
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{koštan} \\ \text{CS}^+ (\text{X}_1, \text{BE/DEAD } [\text{Y}_1]) \\ \text{AFF} (\text{X}_1, [\text{Y}_1]) \\ \text{E} \end{array} \right]$$

This simplified structure shows a basic semantic structure for the verb, whereby X causes Y to be dead. CS⁺ marks successful causation, while the 'i' and 'j' co-indexing shows that the person doing the causing is to be co-indexed with the actor on the action tier (AFF stands for 'affect'), and the person being dead with the patient on the

⁸ This distinction may be made transparent by comparing passive and stative constructions: for example, in Bantu languages, the agent is suppressed in the former but eliminated in the latter (compare 'The house was built (by Jack)' with 'The house collapsed (by Jack)').

action tier. The action tier is not specified for volitionality, since killing may be deliberate or accidental. Finally, the 'E' marks this predicate as complete in its own right; once it has its arguments, it will be fully semantically specified without the need for any additional predicating element.

The verb *sodan* in its passive sense (combined with a past participle) would then have an LCS something like (54):

- (54)
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{sodan} \text{ (passive)} \\ \left[\dots \right] \\ \text{AFF}_{+vol} \text{ (I, I, [Y]_1)} \\ \text{E}_T \end{array} \right]$$

The first level of the LCS is left blank, reflecting the verb's function as an auxiliary. The action tier is specified for [+volitional], and has a blank first argument to show that although there is an implicit actor, it is not the external argument of the verb. The second argument is co-indexed with 'i' to show that the second argument of any predicate with which this verb combines will be both the subject (since no S is specified and every verb must have a subject) and patient (it is the second argument). Finally, the 'E_T' marks the fact that this is a transparent event⁹; *sodan* must combine with some other predicating element before it can be semantically complete.

The LCS for the passive form exhibits clear contrasts with that for the inchoative form:

- (55)
$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{sodan} \text{ (inchoative)} \\ \text{INCH (I}_{state} \text{X)} \\ \text{AFF (X)} \\ \text{E}_T \end{array} \right]$$

This construction has a clear inchoative (INCH) meaning, and specifies the state of a single argument X. Volitionality does not become an issue in the absence of an actor role (Jackendoff (1990:129)). The event is still a transparent one because the verb usually needs to combine with an adjective to describe its patient.

7 Pragmatic considerations

The passive construction is not the only device available for describing an event without specifying the agent. Persian is one of many languages which may use an impersonal third person plural for this purpose:

- (56) *hasan rā kotak zad-and va az tars panhān šod-o*
Hasan DO attack struck-3PL and from fear hid became-3SG
 '(They) beat up Hasan/Hasan was beaten up, and from fear he hid.
- (57) *u-rā gereft-and*
him-DO got-3PL
 '(They) got him/He was arrested

⁹ Baft's (1997) terminology

An alternative is to use an intransitive verb instead of a transitive one, in the case of those pre-verbal elements for which lexical rules allow this:

- (58) a. *Nimā āb-rā be juš āvard-o*
Nimā water-DO to boil brought-3SG
 'Nimā brought the water to the boil.'
- b. *āb be juš āmad-o*
water to boil came-3SG
 'The water came to the boil.'
- (59) a. *Nimā Homā-rā be gerye andāx-t-o*
Nimā Homā-DO to crying threw-3SG
 'Nimā made Homā cry.'
- b. *Homā be gerye oftād-o*
Homā to crying fell-3SG
 'Homā started to cry.'

Where such alternations as those in (58) and (59) are permitted, the passive does not generally occur. Where it can, three options may be available for agent suppression:

- (i) The third person plural impersonal construction (e.g. (57)). It is suggested that this is used either to give a negative connotation to the implicit agent and/or to imply that the agent is a part of some larger impersonal force, such as a foreign power or a criminal network, which the speaker does not want to name.
- (ii) The passive of a compound verb, with the past participle of that compound verb expressed (e.g. (48)). This construction is described as *sangin* 'heavy, formal' or *sagil* 'weighty, indigestible' by mother-tongue Persian speakers. It is suggested that it is used only in more formal language, and then mostly to avoid ambiguity between a passive and an inchoative reading (see section (5) above).
- (iii) The normal passive, with any past participle of a compound verb unexpressed (e.g. (2)). This construction is used in any situation where the speaker does not want to express the agent, other than those situations delineated in (i) and (ii) above. The other side of the 'agent-suppression coin' is a resulting weak topicalization of the patient.

8 Conclusions

This paper has sought to paint a lexicalist picture of the Persian passive construction, justifying an account which takes predicates to be specified for whether or not they can take a passive auxiliary, and which allows those which can to combine with it through a fusion of argument structures to produce a [+volitional] passive construction in which the agent is suppressed. We have further argued that this construction is to be distinguished both from inchoative constructions with *sodan* and from compound verbs consisting of a pre-verbal element and a light verb, showing that all three contribute different amounts of semantic information to the functional structure of the complete predicate.

These conclusions fit with Keenan's (1985) typological generalisations regarding the passive, which leads us to expect that if a language has passives:

- it has basic passives (such as a past participle + auxiliary);
- it has passives of activity verbs;
- it has passives of transitive; and
- the presence of agent phrases is marked.

One additional typological point: Siewierska (1984) notes that in many languages (including German, Latvian, Kupia, Kolami and Hindi) the word for 'inchoative' 'become' does double duty as the passive auxiliary.

Finally, we have noted some of the different mechanisms available in Persian for agent suppression. Although the boundaries are somewhat blurred, it is possible to identify some general principles for choosing between them.

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