Does passivization require a subject category?

Marianne Mithun

Passives are usually described in terms of subjects: they shift subject status from the semantic agent of a clause to a patient or other argument. We might accordingly expect that languages without a robust subject category should lack passives. Here passives are examined in a language with at best only marginal evidence of a subject category, Central Pomo of California. The construction alters argument structure by eliminating the grammatical agent from the clause, but has none of the other syntactic effects expected of passives. It does not promote arguments to subject status. There is no shift in pronominal shape or case marking; patients remain coded as grammatical patients, and obliques as obliques. It is not exploited for purely formal syntactic purposes, such as ensuring coreferentiality of arguments in clause combining. It does, however, serve the same kinds of semantic, pragmatic, and discourse functions as passives in many other languages. It eliminates mention of generic, unknown, irrecoverable, unimportant, predictable, stereotypical, and non-topical agents. The density of passives in spontaneous Central Pomo speech indicates these functions are more than sufficient to justify its central place in the grammar.

Descriptions of passives usually take as a point of departure the category of subject. Bernard Comrie, who has been at the forefront of work on grammatical relations, writes, for example, that the passive is characterized as a process whereby the original subject is deleted or demoted to an agentive phrase while the original object is advanced to subject position (1989: 16). In their survey chapter on passives in the world’s languages, Keenan & Dryer (2007: 352) identify ‘the defining characteristic of passives: in a passive, the corresponding subject in the active is expressed by an element that is neither a subject nor an object in the corresponding passive’. If the function of passives is to shift the subject relation from one argument to another, we might wonder whether the existence of a subject category in a language is a prerequisite for the existence of a passive construction.

There are in fact a number of languages that lack evidence of a subject category and that also lack passives. If this pattern is consistent cross-linguistically, it will constitute an important typological correlation. In what follows, the relationship is examined in detail in a language indigenous to Northern California,
Central Pomo. It will be seen that the correlation is not as universal as might be expected: Central Pomo shows, at best, marginal evidence of a subject category, but a ubiquitous passive. The presence of the robust passive without a strong subject category shows that there is more to passivization than reassignment of the subject relation.

1. Subjects

A variety of approaches have been taken to defining subjects. Some definitions have been framed in terms of particular models of syntax, such as Chomsky's oft-cited 'the relation holding between the NP of a sentence of the form NP^AUX^VP and the whole sentence' (1965: 69). As that model evolved, so did the characterization of subjects within it. More than twenty years later, Radford described subjects in somewhat different terms: 'Subjects originate internally within VP, and subsequently move to spec-TP for checking purposes' (1997: 315). A principle that has not changed over the course of this evolution has been the assumption that subjects are universal to all human languages.

A number of other authors, however, among them Comrie (1989), Mithun (1991a), and Andrews (2007), have observed that not all languages exhibit clear evidence of a formal subject category. In his seminal 1976 work 'Towards a universal definition of subject', Keenan considers a structural definition along the lines of Chomsky 1965: 'the basic-subject is immediately dominated by the root node S; but finds that 'there is no test to determine whether or not a subpart of a sentence is a constituent' (1976: 322). He thus turns to a multi-factor approach, listing 30 properties that are typically associated with subjects, but identifying none as necessary or sufficient. He concludes that 'subjecthood is a matter of degree' (1976: 307). Comrie remarks that 'there seem to be some languages where either there is no category subject, or where the various properties of subject are distributed across more than one noun phrase' (1989: 35). In his comparison of passive and ergative constructions, he provides a set of core subject properties similar to those proposed by Keenan, which include 'nominative case, triggering verb agreement, and being trigger or target for conjunction reduction, undergoing Equi, subject raising, etc.' (1988: 13). This approach to the notion of subject differs from those cited earlier in a fundamental way. Subjects are seen as categories that may or may not develop in various parts of the grammars of individual languages, and to varying degrees. They may be seen in morphological marking, such as the nominative case and verb agreement cited by Comrie, or in syntactic patterns such as conjunction reduction, equivalent noun phrase deletion, or raising. It is this second kind of approach that will be taken here.

2. Central Pomo

Central Pomo is a language of the Pomoan family, indigenous to an area approximately 100 miles north of San Francisco, extending from the California coast to about 50 miles inland.

Pomoan Language Family
Adapted from the Handbook of North American Indians
William C. Sturtevant, ed. Washington: Smithsonian Institution

Languages of this family provide a good test of the hypothesis that the existence of a passive construction is dependent on the presence of subjects. The languages show little evidence of a category with the prototypical subject properties listed by Comrie. The Central Pomo examples cited here are drawn from the speech of Salome Alcantra, Frances Jack, Eileen Oropeza, and Florence Paoli (personal communication).

3. Subjects in Central Pomo

In this section, Central Pomo will be examined for each of the core subject properties cited by Comrie. We begin with more concrete coding properties, observable in morphological marking patterns, then move toward more abstract behavioral properties, observable in syntactic patterns. The structures investigated are pronoun categories, noun case, verb agreement, constituent order, conjunction reduction, relativization, switch reference, and logophoric or cross-clause reflexives.

3.1 Pronouns

As in most languages, the shapes of the pronouns in Central Pomo reflect their grammatical roles. The first person singular pronoun corresponding to the English
subject 'I' is ʔa; The pronoun corresponding to the English object 'me' is jo. The third person singular pronoun corresponding to the English subjects 'he' and 'she' is muːl. The pronoun corresponding to the English objects 'him' and 'her' is muːl.

(1) ʔa: mʊːl ɛː ʔaːdi-ːw.
1sg 3sg away=chase-PERFECTIVE
'I chased him away.'

(2) Muːl joː ɛː ʔaːdi-ːw.
3sg 1sg away=chase-PERFECTIVE
'The chased me away.'

There are three pronominal paradigms, which we term for the moment Set I, Set II, and Set III.

(3) Prominonal paradigms: Mithun 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set I</th>
<th>Set II</th>
<th>Set III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4sg aː</td>
<td>joː</td>
<td>kːe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2sg ma</td>
<td>mgo</td>
<td>mkːe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3sg muːl</td>
<td>mʊːl</td>
<td>mʊːkːe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1sg fiː</td>
<td>fiːjo</td>
<td>fiːkːe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pl ya</td>
<td>yal</td>
<td>yːːkːe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2pl máya</td>
<td>máyal</td>
<td>máya:kːe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3pl mʊːl-yuːa</td>
<td>mʊːl-yuːal</td>
<td>mʊːl-yuːakːe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r.pl tiːya</td>
<td>tiːyal</td>
<td>tiːya:kːe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Set I pronouns in examples (1) and (2) above correspond to English subjects in the translations, and the Set II pronouns to English objects. Further examples show that the sets do not represent subjects and objects, however. Both sets of pronouns appear in intransitive clauses.

(4) Intransitives

Set I: ʔaː | Set II: joː
aː wàgˈjle | ʔaː stdl | 'I would go' | ʔaː tdl | 'I'm sick'
bəːdɛl | ʔaː bəːdəː | 'I dove in' | ʔaː bəːdaː | 'I'm tired'
əː səjəː | əː səjəː | 'I got up' | əː səjəː | 'I'm ticklish'

Both sets of pronouns also appear in transitive clauses. Set I pronouns correspond to English subjects in examples (5a) and (5c), but to the English objects (in (5a) and (5b)). Set II pronouns correspond to subjects in (5b) and (5d), but to the English object in (5d).

(5) Transitives

a. Muːl ʔaː ˈyəːkəkən kwəːn təː ˈdəw. | 1sg recall not 1sg steal
I couldn't think of it.'

b. Mem ˈməː kəkə ˈyəːqəkə, | 1sg thinking about
so as 1sg that thinking about
'That's why I am thinking about it.'

c. Ma joː ˈteːrəndən. | 2sg telling
2sg 1sg telling
'You were telling me.'

d. Toː=wa mə uː ˈyəːqən? | 1sg=0 2sg remember
1sg=0 2sg remember me'

The verbs that occur with Set I pronouns in the examples above, 'go', 'dive in', and 'get up' represent actions and events. Those that occur with Set II forms, being 'sick', 'tired', and 'ticklish' represent states. It might be hypothesized that pronoun choice is determined by aspect. But Set I pronouns also appear with states, and Set II patient pronouns also appear with events.

(6) Set I with states | Set II with events
aː ˈnəː ʔə | ˈnəː ʔə | ˈnəː ʔə | ˈnəː ʔə
'He hiding' | ˈləː yə | ˈləː yə | ˈləː yə
bː ˈbəːhən ˈnəː kəkə | ˈbəːhən ˈnəː kəkə | ˈbəːhən ˈnəː kəkə
'my conceited' | ˈsəːnəːkəkə ˈsəːnəːkəkə | ˈsəːnəːkəkə ˈsəːnəːkə
'He's gonna' | ˈsəːnəːkəkə ˈsəːnəːkə
'I fell'

This is thus not an active/stative system.

It is what is termed an agent/patient system: Set I pronouns generally represent semantic agents, and Set II patients. Some of the examples above might bring to mind a distinction originally introduced by Perlmutter (1978) between unergative and unaccusative verbs. Unergative verbs were defined as intransitives that describe volitional acts and certain involuntary bodily processes. Unaccusative verbs were defined as intransitives that correspond to adjectives in English and whose argument is a semantic patient, as well as predicates of existing and happening, emission of stimuli that impinge on the senses, asetual predicates, and duratives. The Central Pomo system is also based on semantic agency, but it differs in an important way. The unergative/unaccusative distinction was a categorization of intransitive verbs. The Central Pomo pronominal distinction carries through clauses of all kinds, intransitive and transitive, as can be seen in examples (4), (5), and (6).

The notion of semantic agency comprises a cluster of semantic features. Agents usually instigate and perform actions and are in control. In most situations, the features of instigation, performance, and control coincide: someone who dives into a river usually instigates the action, performs it, and controls it. In a few situations, however, the features do not cluster: someone may perform the action of sneezing without being in control. Languages with grammatical agent/
patient systems vary in which feature is given priority for the categorization of arguments. In some languages instigation or performance is criterial. Those who sneeze, choke, or burp are categorized as grammatical agents. In other languages, including Central Pomo, the lack of control is criterial. Those who sneeze, choke, or burp are categorized as grammatical patients.

(7) Performance without control: Set II

\[ \text{fo}: \text{tšęya} \quad 'I \text{ sneezed}' \]
\[ \text{fo}: \text{tšęya} \quad 'I \text{ choked}' \]
\[ \text{fo}: \text{tšę} \quad 'I \text{ burped}' \]

Lack of control alone is not sufficient for categorization as a grammatical patient in Central Pomo, however. Participants must be viewed as both not in control and significantly affected in order to be categorized as grammatical patients, affected in a way with which the speaker empathizes. Inanimate objects and lower animals are not generally cast as grammatical patients. In (5a) above, 'I couldn't think of it' (a name); the name is referred to with a Set I pronoun: the name was not considered sufficiently affected to be cast as a grammatical patient, and certainly not in a way a speaker would empathize with. Similarly in (8) below, the fly was represented with a Set I form, while the person was represented with a Set II patient form.

(8) Set I

\[ \text{Məčtu} \quad \text{a}: \quad \text{hkhım} \]
\[ \text{2.Agent 1.Agent kill} \]
\[ \text{I killed it} (\text{a fly}) \]

Set II

\[ \text{Məčtu} \quad \text{a}: \quad \text{hkhım} \]
\[ \text{3.Patient 1.Agent kill} \]
\[ \text{I killed him} (\text{a person}) \]

Speakers do not use Set II patient forms if they choose not to focus on affectiness or empathize with the semantic patient, even if this is a person. The Set I agent category is thus semantically unmarked, a default category, and the Set II patient category marked.

The agent/patient system has a clear semantic basis, but it is now fully grammaticalized and categorical. Speakers do not make online judgments about degrees of agency as they speak. When they learn a verb, they learn the case frame that goes with it. There is a small set of verbs that appear sometimes with Set I pronouns and sometimes with Set II. These verbs are not evidence of a fluid system: they are lexical doublets. Speakers learn that there are two versions of these particular verbs, one that appears with grammatical agents and the other with grammatical patients.

(9) Lexical doublets

Set I Agents

\[ \text{ì}: \text{smá mře'ë} \quad 'I \text{ went to bed}' \]
\[ \text{ì}: \text{é'nëm} \quad 'I \text{ ran into it}' \]
\[ \text{ì}: \text{Kličk̆εw} \quad 'I \text{ coughed (voluntary)}' \]

Set II Patients

\[ \text{fo}: \text{smá mře'ëka} \quad 'I \text{ must've fallen asleep}' \]
\[ \text{fo}: \text{é'nëm} \quad 'I \text{ bumped into it}' \]
\[ \text{fo}: \text{Kličk̆εw} \quad 'I \text{ coughed (involuntary)}' \]

The Set III pronouns are used as obliques and possessives, usually for alienable possession.

(10) Set III: obliques and possessives

\[ \text{K̆̄g q'da bè̄dum} \quad 'Bring me some water!' \]
\[ \text{K̆̄g bá'p̆̄j̆̄al ač̆̄hèl} \quad 'I'm looking for my father-in-law' \]

3.2 Noun case

Central Pomo shows case marking on nouns, but only on some nouns. These are mainly terms for certain persons, especially kin. Agent nouns are unmarked. Patient nouns carry the suffix -l. In example (11), the nouns 'woman' and 'wife' refer to the same person and share the same grammatical role. Only the term for 'wife' has a patient case form, however.

(11) Patient case on nouns: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.

\[ \text{Múč̆̄ha} \quad \text{má} \quad \text{qul̆̄w} \quad \text{miyà} \quad \text{dágà:.de-l} \]
\[ \text{3.Sg.Possessor woman died} \quad \text{3.Sg.Kinship.Possessor wife-patient} \quad \text{His woman died, his wife (patient)}! \]

When speakers wish to specify the role of an argument identified by a noun that lacks grammatical patient or oblique case forms, they can add a pronoun, though this is not obligatory. In both clauses in (12), the fish is a grammatical patient. The noun 'fish' has no patient case form itself, but the pronoun which follows it specifies its grammatical role.


\[ \text{Yà}: \quad \text{el k̆̄mù} \quad \text{du}: \quad \text{sà} \quad \text{èl máčtu} \quad \text{qàfëcu} \]
\[ \text{bone the other fish the 3.Sg.patient gave} \]
\[ \text{He gave the other fish all his bones.} \]
\[ \text{Mèn údòmà} \quad \text{fš̆:o} \quad \text{muč sà} \quad \text{èl máčtu} \quad \text{ùdàw p̆̄fòw yà} \]
\[ \text{So hearsay now 3.Sg. fish the 3.Sg.patient very many bone} \]
\[ \text{So now, they say, one fish swims around with lots of bones.} \]

3.3 Agreement

In many languages verbs carry a marker that shows agreement in one or more features with their subjects. Certain Central Pomo verbal suffixes and clitics do appear at first to show subject agreement. In most cases, however, a closer look reveals that they are not subject agreement markers after all.

3.3.1 Commands

The imperative endings of commands show agreement for number. The ending for commands addressed to one person is -im, while that for commands to two or more is -ime'.
(13) Imperatives: -im/-ime
   a. Ŝāc-îm 'Listen!' (command to one)
      Ŝāc-îme' 'Listen!' (command to two or more)
   b. Tâsâ mâcâna-m 'Set the table!' (command to one)
      Tâsâ mâcâna-ma 'Set the table!' (command to two or more)

The agreement is actually not with subjects. Imperatives are addressed only to those capable of instigating and controlling events. Commands agree in number with agents.

3.3.2 -fa
The verbal suffix -fa might also appear at first to be a plural subject agreement marker. It occurs in intransitive clauses with both grammatical agents ('they jumped into the water') and grammatical patients ('they are getting older').

(14) -fa
   Mâl qâj: pâqâItaw. 'He jumped into the water.'
   Mâl tuqâj: qâj:âlam. 'They jumped into the water.'
   Mâqât âymâq. 'He is getting older.'
   Mâqât yêmaq. 'They are getting older.'

This suffix actually quantifies events rather than participants. It is a multiple event marker. The people jumping into the water each jumped separately, at a different spot and at a different moment. Those getting older were each getting older individually, at their own pace. The suffix does not occur in verbs portraying group activities. In the sentence in (15), the noun Šnâ 'boat' carries no number marking, but the verb contains the multiple event suffix -fa.

(15) Multiple event -fa
   Šnâ pâqâIâqâItaw. 'They're all moving their boats.'

3.3.3 -ma
A verbal suffix -ma/-m also appears at first to appear to show number agreement with subjects.

(16) -ma
    bên 'he/she carried it (a compact object)'
    bên-mâ: w 'they carried it'

This suffix -ma is not actually a plural marker. It specifies collective agency, that is, the involvement of multiple agents working more or less together.

(17) Collective agency -ma
    a. bên 'one carried it (a compact object)'
       bên-ma:w 'group carried it together'

b. qôdîya '(one) brought it in (something long)'
   qôdî-mma-ya '(group) brought it in together, carrying the same load'

The suffix occurs only in verbs with grammatical agents; it does not occur in verbs whose only argument is a grammatical patient. In (18), the people under discussion are grammatical agents of 'carry', as in (16), and the verb 'carry' contains the collective agency suffix -ma. But the same people are grammatical patients of the verb 'fall', and this verb lacks the suffix.

(18) Multiple agents and patients
    Bênâmâwda  e'nânawsiya.
    bên-ma:w-da  e'nânawwsiya
    carry-collective.agency-prep-as  fall-prep=almost
    'When they carried it in, they almost fell.'

3.3.4 -aq
Another verb suffix might appear to be a plural subject agreement marker. It does not appear on the verb in (19a) 'he brought in firewood', but it does appear on the verb in (19b) 'they brought in firewood'.

(19) -aq
    a. Hây caw âlîya. '(He) brought some firewood into the house.'
    b. Hây caw âlîqâjâya. '(They) brought some firewood into the house.'

This suffix, like the others seen so far, is not an agreement marker either. It is a distributed agency marker. Both sentences (17b) and (19b) are based on the stem 'di- carry something long' and have multiple agents. In (17b) the agents were acting as a group, bringing in one large object together. In (19b), each was acting individually, each carrying separate loads. The distributed agency marker is somewhat more marked than the collective agency suffix -ma. Note that (19b) also contains the multiple event suffix -fa.

3.3.5 =la, =ya, and =wiya
Two other endings might appear to mark subject agreement, this time with subject person.

(20) =la, =ya
    Šsîkî qayûqîwla. 'I just started to eat.'
    Šsîkî qayûqîwma:w. 'We just started to eat.'
    Šsîkî qayûqîy. 'He just started to eat.'
    Šsîkî qayûqîma:w. 'They just started to eat.'

But =la does not occur on verb with a first person subject, and =ya does not occur on every verb with a third person subject. The verb qayûqîw is common for
(21) Štō ḫe ma qayūčiya. 'But you just started eating.' (Are you leaving already?)

These endings are actually evidentials. The enclitic =la indicates that the speaker knows the event happened because he or she was involved as an agent. It contrasts with another enclitic =wiya, which indicates that the speaker knows about the situation because he or she was affected by it. The ending =ya indicates that the speaker knows about the event through direct, first-hand experience. It often appears with third persons, but it can appear with first or second as well.

(22) Evidentials
=la  'I know because I did/am doing/will do it myself, involved
    as an agent.'
=wiya  'I know because it happened to me, I was involved as a patient.'
=ya  'I know from direct observation, first-hand experience'

Pᵈːtʰːlaw=la.  '(I) dove in.'
Dóːtʰ=la.  '(I) did it.'
Mrʰːkwʰːtʰ=la.  '(I) am cooking it.'
Baːtʰː=wiya.  '(I) am tired.'
Balːtʰː=wiya.  '(I) made a mistake.'
Skʰːn=wiya.  '(I) am getting well.'

3.3.6 Stem shape
A number of verbs show drastic differences between singular and plural forms. The differences can be seen both in verbs with grammatical agents and verbs with grammatical patients. (The perfective aspect suffix is -w after vowels and zero after consonants.)

(23) Stem shifts
a. Muːl yów.  'He/she went.'
   Müːtːyːa hlw.  'They went.'
b. Müːtːu mdaːl.  'He/she died.'
   Müːtːyuːl lēy.  'They died.'

These differences in stem shape are also not subject agreement. The two forms are distinct lexical items, part of whose meaning is the number of participants involved. The lexical alternations do not set off a subject category as trigger. Similar alternations can be seen among transitive verb stems, but here it is the number of the patient that is specified. If someone kills one person, the stem haːlīm is used, but if the same person kills more than one, the stem 'lēy is used. If someone lays down one long object, the stem nēm is used, but if he or she lays down more than one, the stem mčʰːm, is appropriate. The alternations do not reflect subject number, agent number, or patient number, but rather absolute number. The number is part of the meaning of the verb, a semantic feature of these lexical items, not unlike that in English stampede or massacre. Absolutive number patterning in the verbal lexicon is widespread cross-linguistically and is generally independent of patterns of case, pronominal shape, or grammatical relations.

3.3.7 Imperfectives
All Central Pomo verbs distinguish aspect. As seen in the examples above, perfective aspect is marked by -w after a vowel and zero after a consonant, regardless of number. Imperfective aspect, however, is marked by a pair of suffixes: -an/-ač (with phonologically-defined variants).

(24) Imperfective suffixes
a. Muːl tʰːkʰː-ːtʰ.  'He is listening.'
   Müːtːyːa tʰːkʰː-ːtʰ.  'They are listening.'

b. Muːl qaːwː-ːtʰ.  'He is eating.'
   Müːtːyːa qaːwː-ːtʰ.  'They are eating.'

The verbs ending in -an, tʰːkʰː-ːtʰ 'is/was listening' and qaːwː-ːtʰ 'is/was eating', are used only with single listeners and eaters (I, 'you,' he, 'she'). The verbs ending in -ač, tʰːkʰː-ːtʰ 'are/were listening' and qaːwː-ːtʰ 'are/were eating', are used only with multiple listeners and eaters ('we,' 'you all,' 'they'). Transitivity makes no difference: the same endings are used with intransitives ('listen') and transitives ('eat X').

It is impossible to determine from these examples whether the -an/-ač alternation is triggered by subject number or agent number, since the listeners and the eaters would be both subjects in a language like English and grammatical agents in Central Pomo. In order to find out, we should compare imperfective sentences in which the argument which would be a subject in English is a grammatical patient in Central Pomo. Imperfective intransitives with grammatical patients are actually vanishingly rare. (States are inflected as perfectives.) Speakers often choose not to highlight the affectedeness of a semantic patient with grammatical patient marking, and they typically do not mention arguments at all when their identity is clear. Two examples have occurred. Both are based on the verb ley 'multiple die', which can appear with a plural patient argument. Both contain imperfective suffixes: the first is a basic imperfective with progressive meaning, and the second a habitual, formed from a sequence of two imperfective markers. Both show the plural imperfective forms -ač, reflecting the plurality of the patient arguments.

a. Mén 'ba ñwáy  `el léyagę́

Men 'ha ñWay `el ley-agę́

so be-and-laughter the multiple, die-imperfective.pl

'And so they were just dying of laughter.'

b. Mida yal smá léya:énčę́

mida ya-l sma ley-agę́-ąčę́

there 1pl-patient sleep multiple, die-imperfective.pl-imperfective.pl

'There we would go to sleep.'

We thus might have a faint glimmer of a subject category as a trigger in imperfective suffix selection. So far it has only surfaced with this one verb root léy 'die', however, and only on these two occasions, over years of recorded conversations.

3.4 Word order

Subjects are frequently invoked in descriptions of constituent order. Basic word order in a language is often characterized as SOV, SVO, VSO, etc. If a language showed rigid and consistent order, it might be possible to define subjects as the first argument in the clause. Central Pomo does not show such invariant order. In the passage in (26), the first clause shows what would be SOV order if Central Pomo had subjects: 'you me beat.' The second could be interpreted as OSV, but the bones could be argued to be outside the nuclear clause: 'All my bones you (from) me will win.' The third, however, shows what would be OSV order: 'All your bones I will win.'


Má to: qálhla.

2sg.agt 1sg.pat beat.if

'e ké:yá: él kí:mu, é má to: ʰáy:ko-e. ...

it.is 1sg.poss bone the all it.is 2sg.agt 1sg.pat will


2sg.poss bone pile the all 1sg.agt will

'If you beat me you'll win all of my bones from me. ... I'll win your whole heap of bones.'

3.5 Conjunction reduction

As pointed out by Keenan, Comrie, and others, evidence of a subject category can be indirect, not marked morphologically but inferable from certain syntactic patterns.

One such pattern is English conjunction reduction, where the second of two coreferential subjects is omitted: He washed his face and _combed his hair_. The distribution of overt arguments in Central Pomo provides no comparable evidence of a subject category. Arguments in any role need not be mentioned so long as reference is clear, whether it be from linguistic or extra-linguistic context. The two sentences in (27) described the action of a little girl who had not been mentioned overtly for several sentences. In the first of the two sentences, the girl was again not mentioned. In the second, neither the girl nor the water was mentioned.


Mén-da bal q'dá  `el bé-čę́

such-at this water the hold-inceptive.perfective

Mí: bé-m.

there hold-essive

'During this time, (she) picked up the water. (She) held (it) there.'

3.6 Switch reference

A number of languages reveal the existence of a subject category in clause-combining constructions known as 'switch-reference.' In his work on the general typological properties of switch-reference systems, Comrie mentions the central role of subjects.

There is marking on the clause-final verb of a dependent clause to indicate whether or not the subject of that clause is coreferential with the subject of the independent clause on which the first clause is dependent. (1983: 18) ... A seququa-non of a switch-reference system is the distinction between same-subject and different-subject forms. (1983: 21).

The Pomoan languages contain constructions that have sometimes been analyzed as switch reference. Clauses are combined by means of suffixes and enclitics with meanings such as 'and', 'if', 'while', and 'then'. The markers are attached to the last word of the dependent clause, which is always the predicate. Different sets of markers are used for irrealis and realis sentences.

(28) Central Pomo dependency markers (Mithun 1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irrealis</td>
<td>-hi =hla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realis</td>
<td>Coincident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consecutive-ka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of the use of the markers are below. The clauses in (29) are linked by the 'same' marker -hi. They have the same subject 'I' in the translation.
The coreferential arguments in (29) are also agents, so it is not clear whether the 'same' switch-reference marker is triggered by subjects or agents. In (30), the coreferential arguments 'you' are translated as English subjects in both clauses but categorized as grammatical patients in Central Pomo. The 'same' marker -hi is again used.

Examples (29) and (30) together suggest that the clause-combining system might indeed reveal a subject category: the 'same' marker is used whether the coreferential arguments are grammatical agents or patients. The 'different' marker =hla 'if' can be seen in example (31). The arguments translated as subjects, 'rain' and 'we', are indeed different.

A closer look at the uses of the Central Pomo dependency markers, however, shows that they do not reveal a subject category after all. The clauses in (32) show different translation subjects and even different agents ('I', 'you') but the 'same' marker -hi was used to connect them.

Does passivization require a subject category? 225

mi::li ma 'di-m=k̕e.
that=with 2SG.AGENT take.multiple-across=FUTURE
on that you'll take them across.'

The clauses in (33) show the same subjects and agents (both 'you'), but the 'different' marker =hla was used.

(33) Irrealis 'different' marker: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
Ma mut 1-w 20-w=hla,
2SG.AGENT that do-PREF not-PREF=DIFERENT.IRREALIS
ma ma: baséq' t̚abdûc̚-c̚-w p̚wi-w=wb̕e.
2SG.AGENT stuff bad happen-refl-PREF visually-perceive-PREF=FUT
'If you don't do that, you're going to see bad things happen.'

In fact the Central Pomo markers do not specify reference relations between arguments after all. They indicate whether the speaker is portraying the situations expressed in the two clauses as components of the same event/state ('same') or as two distinct ones ('different'). This clause-combining system thus does not provide evidence of a subject category.

3.7 Relativization

As demonstrated by Keenan and Comrie (1977) and Comrie (1989: 155–163), evidence of a subject category can be seen in some languages in relative clause formation. In those languages, the argument shared by the main and relative clauses must function as the subject of the relative clause. Sentences like I saw the man [who won] and I saw the man [who won the lottery] are both possible, but not I saw the man [that you mentioned] or I saw the man [that you told me about].

Relativization is not a major construction in Central Pomo, but the structures closest to relative clauses show no such restrictions. We can see this in the last two lines of (34): 'not getting his things ready, the things he was going to wear'. The coreferential 'things' is translated as the object of 'wear'.

(34) Relativization: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
Cālet wás-w-an,
just walk-around-imprf.sg
'tik̕e 20q' ved kay q̚idi 'bá-n 20i-n,
R.SG.POSS.thing the too good get.ready-imprf.sg not-imprf.sg
ši: 20q sim=k̕e.
R.SG.AGENT thing wear=FUTURE
'He was just wandering around, not getting his things ready, the things he was going to wear [the things].'
3.8 Cross-clause reflexives

In English, the subject of an embedded clause need not be mentioned if it is coreferential with an argument of the matrix clause: *He wants _to go, She wants him _to go.* Such constructions have been described in terms of equivalent noun phrase deletion. As seen in the previous section, there are no syntactic restrictions on omitted arguments: it is sufficient that reference be clear.

Central Pomo does, however, contain a special set of pronouns *ti, tiθo, tiξḵe* (singular) and *tiya, tiyaθal, tiyaθḵe* (plural), labeled r in Table 1 in Section 3.1. In example (34) above, *(He)* was just walking around, not getting his things ready, the r possessive *ti ḵe *his* was used because the possessor was also the subject/agent of both *walk around* and *get ready*. Though this subject/agent was not mentioned explicitly in either clause, it controlled the form of the possessive pronoun. It also controlled the form of the pronoun *ti* *he* in the subordinate clause *which he was going to wear*. On the basis of sentences in which it occurs, it is not possible to determine whether the r pronouns are triggered by subjects or agents. The triggers are normally both. Pronouns with functions like these are sometimes called logophoric or cross-clause reflexives. They are used in complements of verbs of saying (their logophoric use), and they show coreference across clauses within a sentence as in (34) (their cross-clause reflexive use). (These pronouns are not used in simple reflexive constructions, which are based on reflexive verbs formed with a derivational suffix -e: *ná: *hide oneself).

The special r pronouns have a second function. They are used when a speaker is taking another's point of view, presenting information as if he or she were inside the mind of the referent. The sentence in (35) was uttered in the course of a conversation while the speaker was looking at her dog. Another dog that had been staying at her house had recently been given away. The use of the special r form *ti ḵe* *his* indicates that the speaker was relaying the thoughts of her dog.

(35) **Point of view: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.**

*‘ddaw qamáqt* / *fú:-/d=á*  háyu.

really angry feel-REFLEXIVE-IMPF.SG=IMMEDIATE dog

*ti ḵe* má:já:man *ti-yá:w.

R.SG.POSSESSOR WOMAN-SPECIFIC take-PASSIVE-PRF

‘The dog feels pretty mad. His woman has been taken away.’

Two different conclusions could be drawn from this example. It could be argued that it demonstrates that the r pronouns are not triggered by subjects after all. The subject of the sentence containing *ti ḵe* *his*, *His* woman has been taken away*, is not the dog but his woman. Alternatively, it could be argued that (35) demonstrates the r pronouns are in fact triggered by subjects rather than agents. The antecedent of *his* is the subject but not the agent of the immediately preceding sentence, *The dog feels pretty mad*. The noun *háyu* *dog* has no patient case form, but those who are angry are generally classified as grammatical patients, especially when the speaker adopts their point of view as here.

It is more likely that the sentences in (34) and (35) represent two now distinct uses of the r pronouns. The r pronouns *ti ḵe* *his* and *ti* *he* in (34) are indeed required by the syntax, triggered by their coreference with the (unmentioned) subjects: *(He)* was just wandering around, *(he)* not getting *his* things ready that he was going to wear. The r pronoun *ti ḵe* *his* in (35) *His* woman has been taken away* is serving a semantic function, indicating that the speaker is portraying the dog's point of view. The syntactic and semantic functions are of course not unrelated. If we choose to infer from (35) that the trigger for the use of r pronouns in syntactic constructions like (34) can be either an agent or patient, then we might have a second possible glimmer of a covert subject category.

3.9 Evidence for a Central Pomo subject category

The search for the core subject properties listed by Comrie in Central Pomo has turned up very little evidence of a subject category in either morphology or syntax. Pronoun shape and noun case distinguish grammatical agents and patients rather than subjects and objects. Nearly all of the verbal morphology that might at first glance be interpreted as subject agreement turns out to be something else. One possible exception are the imperfective suffixes -am/-ač. Two sentences, both based on the verb *lej* *die*, suggest that the choice between the two might be triggered by subject number.

Syntactic patterns similarly show little evidence of a subject category. Counterparts to English word order, conjunction reduction, and equivalent noun phrase reduction do not privilege a subject category. What might at first appear to be a switch-reference system based on coreferentiality of subjects is not actually governed by subject coreference after all. The coreferential argument in relative clauses need not be a subject. There is just one syntactic construction that might provide a glimmer of a subject category: the use of cross-clause reflexive r pronouns: Pronouns whose antecedents are the subject of their clause or a higher clause must have the special r form. Evidence that the trigger must be a subject rests on the interpretation of a slightly different construction involving the same pronouns.

Evidence of a subject category in Central Pomo is thus marginal.
4. Central Pomo passives

If the usual function of passives is to shift the subject relation from one argument to another, we might not expect to find a robust passive construction in Central Pomo. But there is a ubiquitous construction that is usually translated as a passive. It is marked by a verbal suffix -(y)a-.

qvùw 'bear, give birth to, have (a child)' ACTIVE
qvùw-ya-w 'be born' PASSIVE

a. ACTIVE
Sheila do: 'hla kà: qvù-w. NAME QUOTATIVE again child bear-PRF
'She said that Sheila gave birth to another baby.'

b. PASSIVE
Smà baku qvù-ya-w. ear blocked bear-PASSIVE-PRF
'He was born deaf.'

baydè'iw 'answer' ACTIVE
baydè'-a-w 'was answered' PASSIVE

a. ACTIVE
Muì: ɟì'ya=ya ba-yàl'ë-w fi:
that NOW woman=TOPIC orally-answer-SEMEL-ACTIVE-PRF 1SG.PATIENT
'Then a lady answered me.'

b. PASSIVE
[1 don't know how many times I called over there. I thought they were home.]
Muì: ɟì'ya-w'ma ba-yàl'ë-g-w.
that NOT-PRF=FACTUAL orally-answer-SEMEL-ACTIVE-PASSIVE-PRF
'But nobody answered' (lit. 'It wasn't answered."

Both transitive and intransitive clauses can be passivized. Examples (36) and (37) above show passives of the transitives 'give birth to (someone)' and 'answer (someone)'. Example (38) shows a passive of the intransitive łówa'ì 'several talk, converse'.

Łówa'-ya-w 'ida-w. multiple.talk-impréf.pl-PASSIVE-PRF lot
'There's been a lot of talk.'

The effect of passivization is to eliminate any mention of the single argument, the talkers.

The Central Pomo suffix -(y)a- is derivational: it forms new intransitive verb stems. It can occur before or after other derivational suffixes. In the verb in (39) it passivizes a causative stem, so the sequence of suffixes is causative-passive.

[We used to pick lots of acorns there.]
Muì=ì=ma muł yal 'y-em=kà-ga-w 2.
that=ì=FACTUAL that 1PL-PATIENT fingerling-stop-causative-passive copula
'They made us stop picking there.' (We were caused to stop picking.)

In the verb in (40) the causative suffix has scope over a passive stem, so the sequence of suffixes is the reverse: passive-causative.

Muì màk uya ba-sët' jà'ë-ti-w that 3PL-AGENT odd sense-reflexive-PRF
muì: da-ì'=ë-g-kà-w=kë.
that pushing-uncover-passive-causative-PRF-FUTURE
'They feel bad about digging them up.' (causing them to be uncovered)

Usually the primary syntactic effect of passives is to shift the grammatical relation of subject to another argument, a shift that affects all of the core subject properties seen so far, such as case marking, number agreement, and triggering various syntactic patterns.

4.1 Passives and case

The Central Pomo passive construction shares some features with prototypical passives but not others. As in many languages, the semantic agent is eliminated entirely: it is never expressed in an oblique. There is no evidence, however, that the patient is promoted in any way. Pronouns and nouns retain their grammatical patient forms. In (41) the unwanted 'we' is expressed with the pronominal patient form ya1, and those not wanting us are unmentioned.

(41) Unchanged patient pronoun: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
Yal 1PL-PATIENT there want-RPL-IMPRF.PL-PASSIVE-PRF bot-IMPRF.SG
'mì: dà'ë-g-w 1PL-PATIENT there want-RPL-IMPRF.PL-PASSIVE-PRF bot-IMPRF.SG
'We're not wanted there.'

In (42) the role of the deceased woman is specified with the patient pronoun màkì after the noun phrase and an evidential, but the agents who laid her out are not mentioned.
4.2 Passives and number

In languages like English, where verbs can show number agreement with the subject, passivization results in a shift in the agreement trigger. Agreement markers reflect agent subject number in active constructions but patient subject number in passives: *jokes always amuse* (plural) *him* versus *he is* (singular) always amused by *jokes*. The triggers of all verbal number marking in Central Pomo remain unchanged under passivization. The participants in the situation whose number was reflected in the basic construction are the same ones whose number is reflected in the -ya- construction.

As described earlier, the meaning of some verb stems includes a specification of the number of the absolutive argument: the single argument of intransitives and the patient of transitives. The verb *mdal* is used if one person dies, but the verb *ley* is used if more than one dies. The verb *hk'um* 'kill' is used for killing one person, while the verb *ley* is used for killing more than one. As would be expected, passivization does not alter the reference of the absolutive argument. In the clause 'this man was killed there,' the verb for killing one person was used, just as it would be in its active counterpart 'they killed one man there.'

(43) Singular verb: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.

\[ \text{M}^\text{ul} \text{ do, } \text{mi}^\text{is} \]

\[ \text{p}^\text{b} \text{wi-m-a-w} \text{ m}^\text{ul} \text{ ã} \text{t} \]

\[ \text{visually-perceive-COLLECTIVE-AGENCY-PASSIVE-PRF} \quad \text{that man} \]

\[ \text{bal} \text{ hihk'ù:m-a-w} \text{ ã} \text{mi}^\text{is} \]

\[ \text{this kill-ONE-PASSIVE-PRF COPULA-there-at} \]

'They say he was seen there (by more than one), this man that was killed there.'

The trigger of the collective agency suffix -m(a) also remains unaffected by passivization. In the clause 'he was seen there' in (43) above, the verb 'seen' contains the collective agency suffix -m-, though there is no overt agent argument in that clause. The suffix, which is derivational, reflects the semantics of the situation rather than the syntactic structure of the clause. Similarly, in the clause 'they're put in boxes' [coffins] in (44) below, the plural stem in the passive verb 'multiple were put' reflects the fact that multiple bodies are involved, and the collective agency suffix -ma- reflects the fact that a group does this work together.

(44) Plural verb: Florence Paoli, speaker p.c.

\[ \text{Mul} \text{ ã} \text{t} \]

\[ \text{that sense=IMMEDIATE} \]

\[ \text{that could be} \]

\[ \text{kâhôn} \text{ me}^\text{t} \text{ m}^\text{dāt-ja-m-a-w.} \]

\[ \text{box that put.multiple-MULTIPLE.EVENT-COLLECTIVE-AGENCY-PASSIVE-PRF} \]

\[ \text{box that they are put} \]

'I think they're put in boxes.'

The only morphological distinction found in the language that might be triggered by subjects was the imperfective pair -an/-ac'. The possibility that their alternation might be triggered by subject number rather than agent number was based on just two sentences, both based on the verb *ley* multiple die. Central Pomo passives are themselves always perfective: they describe a state resulting from an event or activity, and in Central Pomo, states are classified grammatically as perfective. They thus end in the perfective marker -w after vowels or zero after consonants. Passives often contain imperfective markers before the final perfective suffix, however, which indicate the aspect of the activity that established the passive state. Interestingly, the choice between the two imperfective suffixes remains unchanged under passivization. It reflects the number of agents responsible for the original event, even though the agents are no longer syntactic arguments of the clause. In (45) 'What is going to be discussed here?', the plural imperfective suffix -ac' (here -ac) reflects the fact that all members of the group were going to participate in the discussion.

(45) Passive of plural imperfective: Salome Alcantra, speaker p.c.

\[ \text{Q}^\text{b}=\text{k}^\text{e} \]

\[ \text{kdw-} \text{a}-\text{ya-} \text{w} \]

\[ \text{what=from multiple.talk-IMPREF.PL-PASSIVE-PRF FUTURE here-at} \]

\[ \text{about what it will be discussed} \]

\[ \text{here} \]

'What are we going to talk about here?'

Habitual aspect is indicated by a sequence of two imperfective suffixes, both of which show the -an/-ac' alternation for number. In the habitual verb in (46), both imperfective suffixes show the plural form, reflecting the number of the unnamed agents, even though the agents are not arguments of the clause.
4.3 Passives and cross-clause reflexives

The only other possible evidence of a subject category in Central Pomo was the use of the special r pronouns for arguments that are coreferential with the subject (or agent) of their clause or a higher clause. It was not determined for certain whether the controllers of these pronouns are subjects or agents, because the straightforward instances of their use all involve triggers that could be classified as either. If passivization resulted in a shift in control of the pronominal form from the agent to the patient, we would have evidence of a subject category in this construction. We could conclude that it was the subject that triggered use of the r pronouns rather than the agent.

There is no shift. The single argument of the passive need not control the pronoun. In the passive sentence in (47), 'We were not paid attention to when we went into their stores,' the possessive fita:k'e 'their' is coreferential with the semantic agent, which is not even an argument of the sentence. The use of the r pronoun here is not an instance of empathetic or logophoric use. The speaker was describing white storekeepers in a nearby town who refused to recognize Pomo customers. She was neither taking the point of view of the storekeepers nor relating something they had told her.

(47) r pronouns: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
Qe=fj  *-mwl  yal,
what-but copula=that 1pl.patient
at all it is us
hol=yo=ma=le
1pl.personal=agent=conditional
not-imprf.sg
would come
not
ya  store, fita:k'e  store=da
1pl.agent  store  r.pl.possessive
we  store  their  in the store
či-w  hli-w=da.
house-in multiple.go=prf=different
inside when would go in
'We were not paid attention to when we went into their stores.'

The same situation obtains with the logophoric use of the r pronouns. The r pronouns need not be coreferential with the patients of passives. The speaker cited in (48) was recounting what the victim had told her. If the use of the r pronouns were triggered by subjects, the things done would have to be the trigger for the fija: and fita: pronouns. But these pronouns refer to the victims, including the person who had described the events to the speaker.

(48) Logophoric use: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
do:  fija:
ma:  yhé:j-d-ya-w.
quote  r.pl.patient stuff  do-multiple.event-imprf.pl-passive-prf
Tito
ma:  yhé:j-ya-w.
1st.sg.patient stuff  do-imprf.pl-passive-prf
'A lot of things were done to them. Things were done to her.'

Passivization in Central Pomo appears to have none of the syntactic effects typical of passivization in other languages, even in the two constructions that could possibly reflect evidence of a subject category, namely the imperfective aspect suffixes and the cross-clause reflexives.

5. The functions of passives

The close association between subjects and passives cross-linguistically is not surprising, given their usual ranges of functions. Comrie writes:

The prototype of subject represents the intersection of agent and topic, i.e., the clearest instances of subjects, cross-linguistically, are agents which are also topics (1989: 107).

Passivization would indicate a shift in topic away from the semantic agent toward the semantic patient. There has been considerable discussion of whether the primary function of passives is to demote non-topical semantic agents out of subject status, or to promote topical semantic patients into subject status. Givón explains that passives with both functions exist, and this difference defines the main typological split between kinds of passive constructions.

The main typological features that distinguish promotional from non-promotional passive clauses is the presence vs. absence, respectively, of profound re-adjustment in grammatical relations – thus in overall syntactic structure – in the passive clause, relative to the direct-active clause. (Givón 2001.II: 127)

He sees the primary function of passives as agent demotion.

As suggested above and following Shibatani (1985), the prototypical passive voice is used primarily for agent suppression or de-topicalization. The fact that a non-agent argument – most commonly the patient – is then topicalized is but the default consequence of agent suppression. (Givón 2001.II: 125)
He outlines the characteristics of the prototypical non-promotional passive as follows (2001:II: 128).

Main feature
a. The non-agent topic of passive does not undergo full promotion to subjecthood, but rather retains its characteristic active-verb grammatical role.

Associated features
b. The agent/subject of the active is typically missing.
c. Consequently, the syntax of the passive clause tends to resemble that of the direct-active.
d. There is no restriction on the non-agent case roles that can become the topic of the passive.
e. Consequently, passivization can also apply to intransitive verbs.

Central Pomo passives fit this profile perfectly. They result in the elimination of the agent from the clause, but no promotion of the patient or any other argument. Various motivations have been observed behind speakers’ choices of agent-denoting passives, some semantic, some pragmatic, and some syntactic.

(49) Motivations for agent demotion
The agent may be generic.
The agent may be unknown or irrecoverable (Givón 2001).
The agent may be unimportant. (Givón 2001)
The agent may be predictable and stereotypical. (Givón 2001)
The speaker may wish to avoid assigning responsibility (Shibatani 1985, 1988).
The speaker may wish to preserve topicality.
The language may have syntactic restrictions on clause combining that are controlled by subjects.

All of these semantic and pragmatic motivations can be seen in uses of the Central Pomo passive construction, except for the syntactic ones.

5.1 Semantic and pragmatic motivations
Some uses of the Central Pomo passive involve generic agents.

(49) Generic agent: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
Tú: dá ɛl ke: -t-ɑ-’ɑ-w
skin the clean.with.knife-MULTIPLE.EVENT-IMPRF.PL-PASSIVE-PRF dot-IMPRF.SG
’t.The skin isn’t peeled off with a knife.’

When generic agents are eliminated from the clause by passivization, the result can be a focus on the activity described by the verb, rather than on a particular participant. For this reason, passives are often used to name activities.

(50) Passive terms for activities: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
Hinčil ma: yhé: t-a-’ɑ-w
Indian things do-MULTIPLE.EVENT-IMPRF.PL-PASSIVE-PRF
Indian things being done
c’vé mc-né-m-ɑ-w
dance kicking-set-PASSIVE-PRF
dance being danced
ma: wéyua ma: yhé: t-a-’ɑ-w met’
things sacred things do-MULTIPLE.EVENT-IMPRF.PL-PASSIVE-PRF that.kind
things sacred things being done
dá: ’ɑ-w f’i-n.
want-REFLEXIVE-IMPRF.SG-PASSIVE WHAT-IMPRF.SG
like
not
‘Indian celebrations, pow wow dances, sacred things, sacred doings, he didn’t like that kind of thing.’

Some uses of passives involve unknown or irrecoverable agents. The sentence in (51) was uttered while the speaker was looking at baskets displayed on her wall.

(51) Unknown agent: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
Bal ɛl koy ɛy dób: ’ɑ-w
this the two where make-IMPRF.PL-PASSIVE-PRF
a: p’i: yá:q’ é: d-ɑ-w.
1SG.AGENT visually-recognize not-PRF
‘I don’t know where this one was made.’

The agent may be unimportant.

(52) Unimportant agent: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.
[Their house was close to this road.]
Mí: lq’i
that-at stick
muc: ú: tama m: d: bal čé: č am-ɑ-’ɑ-w
that HEARSAY there HEARSAY this person BURY-COLL.AGENT-PASSIVE-PRF
‘Alongside of it they say a lot of buried people
maq’d-t-aq’-ɑ-w.
find-MULTIPLE.EVENT-DISTR-PASSIVE-PRF
were discovered.
‘They discovered a lot of people buried (alongside of the road).’

The agent may be stereotypical, like the water that washed dirt off the hill.
Stereotypical agent: Salome Alcantra, speaker p.c.

Mā:  `w-danō  t`l  s-kē-ʃ-a-w
land  copula-mountain  the  by.liquid-clean-MULTIPLE.EVENT-PASSIVE-PRF

`ta:  mu:  
feel  that
'That hill land was washed away, I guess.'

Passives allow speakers to avoid identification of agents.

Avoidance of agent identification: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.

['"When you come into the schoolyard, don't speak Indian any more", she [the teacher] told me.]

Mu:  mto  is,di-ya,ja-w=ki,pe.
that  2SG.PATIENT  swinging-whip-PASSIVE-PRF=future

'You'll get whipped.'

Of course these motivations are not necessarily discrete.

5.2 Syntactic motivations

A number of languages have requirements of coreference among subjects in clause-combining constructions. In such languages, passivization can serve to promote the semantic patient of a clause to subject status so that the clause can be conjoined with another with a coreferential subject. Such a language might not permit sentences like He made them angry and they chased him away, but permit He made them angry and (he) was chased away.

There are no coreference requirements in Central Pomo. Combined clauses may or may not share arguments, whether or not the linking dependency markers portray them as elements of the same event or as different events. Passivization is thus not used to satisfy formal requirements of subject coreference. The intransitive clauses in (55) are translated with different subjects: 'they' and 'he'. The passivization of the second clause, 'and then he'll be chased out of here', actually results in the elimination of an argument that would be coreferential with the agent of the first clause 'they'll talk like that'. Interestingly, the 'same' dependency marker was used, indicating that the two clauses are portrayed as elements of a single event.


Mēn  lōw-σ=hi  e  mu:  
so  multiple.talk-IMPRF.PL-SAME.IRMREALIS  copula that
qōw=yo-enka-ma,w=ki,pe.
out=go-CAUSATIVE-COLLECTIVE.AGENCY-PASSIVE-PRF=future

'They'll talk like that and then he'll be chased out of here.'

As seen earlier, though relative clauses are not a major construction in Central Pomo, there are no restrictions on the argument structure of their closest counterparts.

5.3 Discourse motivations

There is of course a reason why formal requirements of subject coreference between combined clauses develop in languages. It is related to the essential function of subjects described earlier: the notion that subjects are essentially grammaticalized topics, 'what the sentence is about' (Comrie 1989: 64). Speakers are more likely to combine sentences that share the same topic, the same point of departure.

Though we have seen very little evidence of a formal subject category in Central Pomo, either in coding or behavior, we can see the use of passivization to manage discourse coherence, by ensuring that topical participants maintain a prominent grammatical position in the clause, in many cases by eliminating a potential competitor, the agent, from the clause. The passage in (56) below occurred near the beginning of a story about two fish who decided to play a game. The passive in the first sentence serves to focus attention on the activity of playing by eliminating the agent players from the clause. The passive in the second serves to turn attention to one of the fish, establishing him as a topic, by eliminating the agent, the winning fish, from the clause.

(56) Topicalization: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.

Mēn  mu:  bal  qālō-σ-a-w.
so  this  gamble-INCEPTIVE-PASSIVE-PRF

`ta:ya  idōma  ida,w  ʃe-ley-a-w.
one-TOPIC  hearsay  lots  gambling-exhaust-PASSIVE-PRF

'So then they started to play. (So then gambling was begun.) One of them, they say, was getting beaten a lot.'

In the passage in (57), the white people were explicitly introduced as the agents of the first matrix clause in the third line. If this clause had been passivized, they could not have been mentioned at all. In the following line, the matrix clause was passivized and the white people, the agents, were eliminated entirely, shifting the topic to the old man, the only remaining argument.

(57) Topicalization: Frances Jack, speaker p.c.

Ca-`yem  t`l,
man-old the
idōma  dā=wi  wā-da-n  mu:fu
hearsay  road=in  walk-IMPRF.SG-SS.SAME.IRMREALIS  3SG.PATIENT
p=ya-enqa-ta-m  mas;i=ya.
visually-recognize-ME-DISTR-ME-COLLECTIVE.AGENCY  white=TOPIC
Eucheé, and Haida, all show agent/patient or active/staticive organization in their core argument marking, and they lack prototypical passives (Mithun 2008). The closest counterparts of passives in these languages are impersonal agent constructions, where the agent is specified by an indefinite agent pronoun meaning 'one' or 'they.' These constructions permit the backgrounding or defocusing of the semantic agent, but there is no change in argument structure.

Languages of the Pomoan family, however, illustrated here with material from Central Pomo, show that the correlation is not exceptionless. They exhibit at best only marginal evidence of a subject category, but they contain a robust construction that is typically translated as a passive. The construction alters argument structure by eliminating the grammatical agent from the clause, but has none of the other syntactic effects expected of passives. It does not promote arguments to subject status. There is no shift in pronounal shape or case marking; grammatical patients remain coded as patients, and obliques as obliques. There is no change in the trigger of number agreement: imperfective marking continues to reflect agent number, and the collective agency and distributive agency markers continue to reflect features of agents. The syntactic use of cross-clause reflexive pronouns continues to be triggered by agents as well. Syntactically, the construction is a non-promotional passive. It simply eliminates one argument from the clause, the agent.

Despite the lack of a subject category in Central Pomo, the passive construction is ubiquitous in speech. It serves the same kinds of semantic, pragmatic, and discourse functions as passives in many other languages. It eliminates mention of generic, unknown, irrecoverable, unimportant, predictable, stereotypical, and non-topical agents.

A minor correlation has emerged between the absence of a robust subject category and the place of the passive in the grammar of Central Pomo. The Central Pomo passive is not exploited for purely formal syntactic purposes, such as ensuring that conjoined clauses have coreferential subjects, or that the shared argument of a relative clause be a subject. The density of passives in spontaneous Central Pomo speech indicates, however, the semantic, pragmatic, and discourse effects of the construction are more than sufficient to justify its central place in the grammar.

6. Conclusion

It was observed at the outset that passives are usually described in terms of the category of subject: they shift subject status from the semantic agent of a clause to a patient or other argument. We might accordingly expect that languages without a robust subject category should lack passives. A cursory survey of such languages in North America indicates that this is indeed generally the case. Languages of the Caddoan, Muskogean, Iroquoian, and Siouan families, as well as isolates Tunica,

**Abbreviations**

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The definiteness of subjects and objects in Malagasy

Edward L. Keenan
UCLA 2007

We evaluate, for Malagasy (W. Austronesian; Madagascar), a standard observation regarding the distribution and marking of (in)definites in subject and in object position. Bare nouns naturally constitute direct objects (DOs) with an indefinite interpretation. But definite DOs are also natural, and some are marked with a preposition which also has a locative function (cf. Roumanian, Spanish). Bare Ns do not occur as subjects, whereas inherently definite DPs – proper nouns, personal pronouns, demonstratives, Ns with a definite or previous mention article do. However three classes of Quantified DPs – cardinal, universal, and proportionality ones, also naturally occur as subjects. They are constructed with an apparent definite article, but their meanings in English would be called indefinite.

1. Introduction

Natural languages (NLs) present a commonly acknowledged duality with regard to the definiteness interpretation and marking of subjects and of objects:

**Definiteness Duality (DD)**

1. NLs generally allow direct objects to be indefinite without specific morphological marking. Definite objects may be overtly marked (Comrie 1978, 1981: Ch 6).

2. NLs always allow definite subjects and may restrict subjects to definites.

W. Austronesian languages, such as Tagalog and Malagasy, are often regarded as strong instantiations of both parts of the DD. Here we assess how well Malagasy (Madagascar) conforms to the DD. Malagasy does satisfy D.1 in ways comparable to many other languages. But we also see that in general definite object marking is subject to much language particular variation involving factors other than definiteness. Regarding D.2, classical definities such as personal pronouns, proper names, and NPs built from Ns with a definite article or demonstrative occur very naturally as subjects in Malagasy. But – and this is what is new here – Malagasy
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