

On the Perspectivization of a Recipient Role – Cross-linguistic Results from a Speech Production Experiment on GET-passives in German, Dutch and Luxembourgish*

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1. On the perspectivization of a thematic role

The focus of this paper is the *perspectivization* of thematic roles generally and the recipient role specifically. Whereas *perspective* is defined here as the representation of something for someone from a given position (Sandig 1996: 37), *perspectivization* refers to the verbalization of a situation in the speech generation process (Storrer 1996: 233). In a prototypical act of giving, for example, the focus of perception (the attention of the external observer) may be on the person who gives (agent), the transferred object (patient) or the person who receives the transferred object (recipient). The languages of the world provide differing linguistic means to perspectivize such an act of giving, or better: to perspectivize the participants of such an action.

In this article, the linguistic means of three selected continental West Germanic languages –German, Dutch and Luxembourgish– will be taken into consideration, with an emphasis on the perspectivization of the recipient role. Since this role is the role which – in an active sentence – is prototypically born by the indirect object, good candidates for a construction perspectivizing the recipient are passive constructions. This can be explained by some of these constructions' main functions, formulated by Zifonun [et al.] (1997: 1849ff.) with regard to the German language:

- **argument reduction:** Passive constructions offer the possibility of argument reduction in that an actant who must be verbalized in the active construction can be left unmentioned.
- **argument restructuring:** The aspect of argument restructuring concerns the discourse grammatical level. In the general case, where scope differences do not have an effect, the passive offers the possibility of syntactic realization, linearization and communicative emphasis of *one* identical proposition. Both

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- structural possibilities, active and passive, complement one another especially with regard to the concurrent taking over of the subject role, the topic position and the role of thematic purpose. In cases where the argument phrase which could have this role is an accusative or a dative complement, this consonance (*Gleichklang*) can (often) only be realized by the passive.

In order to illustrate these two central functions, some examples taken from the experiment data pool (see below) are consulted. The examples in (1) are mostly evoked by the video stimuli “giving a pot of flowers”. They represent the prototypical answer types provided by the informants to the question “What’s happening to the man in the video clip?”. As the answer types illustrate, the informants use different constructions to achieve an argument reduction in their description of the scenes. On one hand, a non-verbalization of the agent (the “giving person”), is provided by active constructions where the central figure is in the role of a recipient who *receives* a pot of flowers (s. 1a). On the other hand, argument reduction is achieved by passive constructions in which either the recipient of the action (s. 1c) or the patient, i.e. the pot of flowers (s. 1b, German example), has “moved” into the subject position of the sentence. Whereas all three constructions mentioned allow argument reduction by non-verbalization of the agent, only the answer type exemplified in (1c) additionally provides the above mentioned coincidence of subject function, topic position and thematic purpose. In the German and Luxembourgish examples in (1c), we are dealing with the so-called dative or recipient passive whose subject corresponds to the dative in a corresponding active sentence (e.g., German *jemand gibt ihm einen Blumentopf* ‘Someone is giving him a pot of flowers’). A similar Dutch construction with *krijgen* ‘to get’ is characterized as a “semi passive” in the research literature and consequently (still?) seems to have a different status within the active/passive system of Dutch (s. 2.2).

- (1) Most frequent answer types to the question “What’s happening to the man in the video clip?” (scene “giving a pot of flowers” and others)
- (a) GERMAN: *Er bekommt/kriegt einen Blumentopf.*
LUXEMBOURGISH: *Hie kritt ee Blummestack.*
DUTCH: *Hij krijgt een bloempotje.*
‘He is getting a pot of flowers’
- (b) GERMAN: *Ihm wird ein Blumentopf geschenkt.*
‘A pot of flowers is being presented to him’
LUXEMBOURGISH: *Him ginn d’Hoër geschnidden.*
‘His hair is being cut (for him)’

- DUTCH: *Er wordt hem een bril op zijn neus gezet.*
'Glasses are being put on his nose (for him)'
- (c) GERMAN: *Er bekommt/kriegt einen Blumentopf geschenkt.*
LUXEMBOURGISH: *Hie kritt eng Planz geschenkt .*
DUTCH: *Hij krijgt een bloempotje geschonken.*
He is getting a pot of flower/plant presented to him'

The aim of this paper is to answer the following questions:

- What are the different possibilities available to German, Luxembourgish and Dutch speakers for perspectivizing the recipient, the beneficiary, or the maleficiary? Which do they prefer and which are less popular?
- What motivates the choice of a special passive construction over other possibilities and also over active constructions?
- What do the results tell us about the functions and the status of the different GET-passives in continental West Germanic languages?

The article is structured as follows: In section 2, the focus is on West Germanic constructions with *get* verbs plus past participle. The starting point is German and its *kriegen/bekommen*-passive (section 2.1). The German construction, which will receive the most attention, will be the point of comparison for Luxembourgish and Dutch GET-passives or near-passive constructions, respectively (section 2.2). In section 3, the methods and results of a speech production experiment, which was developed especially to provide answers to the questions above, will be presented. The paper closes with a summary and an outlook towards future research (section 4).

2. GET-passives and semi-passives in continental West Germanic languages

2.1 On the *kriegen/bekommen*-passive in German

The starting point of the cross-linguistic analysis is German whose standard variety provides three passive types (*Passivformen*, Duden 72005: 474) exemplified in (2):¹

- (2) German passive types
- (a) *werden* ('to become') passive (*Vorgangspassiv* 'event passive')
Seine Haare werden ihm (vom Friseur) geschnitten.

¹ Besides these passive constructions, German of course has other construction types with a passive reading but these modal passive variants shall be neglected here. Examples of these include recessive reflexive verbs (*sich öffnen* 'to open (intransitive)'), causative constructions with *lassen* 'to let' (*sein Haar schneiden lassen* 'to have his hair cut') and others (cf. Duden 72005: 555f.).

- ‘His hair is being cut *for him* (by the hairdresser)’
- (b) *sein* (‘to be’) passive (*Zustandspassiv* ‘state passive’)
Seine Haare sind geschnitten.
literal: *His hair is cut* = ‘He has had a haircut’
- (c) *bekommen/kriegen* (‘to receive/get’) passive (*Rezipientenpassiv* ‘recipient passive’)
Er bekommt/kriegt seine Haare (vom Friseur) geschnitten.
‘He is getting his hair cut (by the hairdresser)’

The most frequent and most common passive construction in German is the “Vorgangspassiv” (or *werden* passive) constructed with the auxiliary *werden* ‘to become’ plus past participle of a main verb. In comparison to this default passive variant, the “Zustandspassiv” (or *sein* passive) construction with the auxiliary *sein* and a past participle, is prototypically a resultative construction expressing the *result* of the action denoted by the main verb. *Werden*- and *sein*-passives can be constructed by the majority of transitive verbs. In the case of passive-capable lexical verbs, the subject of the *werden* and *sein* passive prototypically corresponds to the accusative (i.e., direct) object in the corresponding active sentence *Der Friseur schneidet ihm seine Haare* ‘the hairdresser is cutting his hair *for him*’. The subject of the active sentence can be realized either in the form of a prepositional phrase with *von* or *durch* (e.g., *vom Friseur* ‘by the hairdresser’) or can be left out. In (2c), a recipient passive is realized which is usually constructed with a ditransitive verb. The crucial difference between the recipient passive and the other passive forms mentioned is that the subject of this passive type corresponds to the dative of the corresponding active sentence: *Der Friseur schneidet ihm seine Haare* ‘the hairdresser is cutting his hair *for him*’. In the research literature, we find several labels for this construction: Besides *Rezipientenpassiv* ‘recipient passive’, the construction is referred to, for example, as *Dativpassiv* ‘dative passive’, *Benefizientenpassiv* ‘beneficiary passive’, *kriegen*-Passiv (get passive) and *bekommen*-Passiv (receive passive).² These labels give some initial hints concerning the form and functions of the construction:

1. *bekommen* ‘to receive’ and *kriegen* ‘to get’ are the most frequent auxiliaries in the construction, whereas *erhalten* ‘to obtain’ is clearly rarer.
2. The construction functions to emphasize the dative of the corresponding active sentence. With regard to the semantic roles of the subject, it functions to emphasize the recipient, the person who gets something, or the beneficiary/maleficiary of the action, i.e. the person who is affected by the action in a positive or negative way, respectively.

We can observe a growing research interest in the recipient passive over the last three decades. Whereas there was controversy regarding the passive status of the

² See for example, Eroms 1978, Askedal 1984, Abraham 1995, Leirbukt 1997, Molnárfi 1998, Duden 2005: 556ff., Glaser 2005, Askedal 2005.

construction in the 1980s, current research has shifted towards other theoretical questions (cf. Molnarfi 1998), e.g. the status of the dative in German syntax (is it a “structural case” or not?) or the grammaticalization paths of the construction (cf. Askedal 2005). Besides theoretical approaches, empirical research on the phenomenon has also been carried out: With regard to written language, Leirbukt (1997) has so far published the most detailed empirical research on the recipient passive. On the basis of written and near-standard corpora, he determined that lexical verbs used as a participle in the recipient passive are mostly ditransitive verbs. Their semantics can be identified as encoding a change of HAVE relations in the broadest sense. Additionally, the lexical verbs of the construction display the semantic feature [+action]. Concerning the passive auxiliaries, *bekommen* dominates in the data, which is not surprising since Leirbukt deals with written language. A systematic evaluation of recipient passives within spoken language was undertaken for the first time by Lenz (2007b). The analysis of dialectal and regiolectal sound recordings in the “Datenbank Gesprochenes Deutsch (DGD)” of the Institute for German Language (IDS) in Mannheim provides information about the areal distribution of the passive variant. On the basis of these recordings from the so-called “Zwirner” and “Pfeffer” corpora, an areal core region where the recipient passive displays the highest frequencies can be detected. This core region, which comprises the dialect areas of Central and Rhine Franconian in the Central German area, and Low Franconian in the Low German area, is characterized not only by the highest quantity of recipient passives, but also by the highest qualitative variation in the construction. That means, for example, that we also find instances of the passive constructed with other verbs, especially with dative verbs like *helfen* (‘to help’) or *drohen* (‘to threaten’). Comparing the dialectal and regiolectal (and therefore more near-standard) recordings, we can observe a diffusion of the passive in the “horizontal” areal dimension (across dialects) and also in the “vertical” dimension towards the standard language. In contrast to Leirbukt’s written corpora, in which *bekommen* is the most frequent auxiliary, *kriegen* is by far the most frequent auxiliary in the recordings in the IDS corpora.

In order to gain insights into the diachronic paths of the recipient passive,³ I have taken different historical corpora into consideration, which consist of textual material from the 14th century onwards:

- The “Bonner Frühneuhochdeutsch Korpus”, which is available online (<http://virto52.zim.uni-duisburg-essen.de/fnhd/Suche/>), consists of 40 selected texts of different types from the Early New High German period (between 1350 and 1700).
- The “Münstersches txt-Korpus: Hexenverhörprotokolle”⁴ consists of 94 transcripts from witch trials, also from Early New High German (between 1565 and 1656).

³ *Grammaticalization* is defined here as “that subset of linguistic changes through which a lexical item in certain uses becomes a grammatical item, or through which a grammatical item becomes more grammatical” (Hopper/Traugott 1993: 2).

⁴ Topalovic, Elvira/Iris Hille/Jürgen Macha: Münstersches txt-Korpus: Hexenverhörprotokolle. Münster (Stand: November 2007).

- The “Auswandererbriefe”-corpus tells us something about *kriegen* in the 19th century.⁵ The corpus consists of 675 emigrants’ letters whose writers are mostly from lower classes and who attained a low level of education (see Elspaß 2005).

The historical corpus analyses provide evidence of the following hypothesized chronology: *Kriegen* can be traced back to the noun *Kreg* whose Old High German semantics can be identified as ‘pertinacity’ and later also as ‘fight’ and ‘struggle’ (cf. DWb 1873, Paul 2002). The verb *kriegen* derived from this noun is detectable in Middle High German where it is mostly an intransitive verb bearing the meanings of ‘to exert’, ‘to strive’, ‘to struggle’ or ‘to fight’. The sense of ‘getting something by effort’ firstly occurs with the Middle High German prefix verb *erkriegen*. Hence, we are originally dealing with a transitive *kriegen* variant with an active reading which is still detectable in current *kriegen* variants of Modern German (3a).

(3) Examples of agentive/causative *kriegen* variants in Modern German

- (a) *kriegen* + NP: *Ich kriege dich schon noch!*
‘I’ll get you!’
- (b) *kriegen* + NP + PP: *Er kriegt die Maus aus dem Haus.*
‘He gets the mouse out of the house’
- (c) *kriegen* + *dazu* + *zu*-inf.: *Sie kriegt ihn dazu sein Auto zu waschen.*
‘She gets him to wash his car’
- (d) *kriegen* + *zum*-inf.: *Ich kriege ihn zum Weinen.*
‘I get him to cry’
- (e) *kriegen* + AP: *Ich kriege die dreckige Wäsche sauber.*
‘I get the dirty laundry clean’
- (f) *kriegen* + NP + past part.: *Er kriegt das Problem gelöst.*
‘he gets the problem solved’ =
‘he manages to solve the problem’

Occurrences with agentive/causative *kriegen* plus NP plus an additional PP, an adverb or a particle have been found in the corpora since the beginning of Early New High German. Constructions of this type can be paraphrased as ‘to bring someone to a certain place or to get someone into a certain state’ (s. 3b). Very close to that construction are combinations of causative *kriegen* plus NP plus *dazu* plus a *zu*-infinitive (s. 3c) or causative *kriegen* plus NP plus *zum*-infinitive (s. 3d). Besides this causative construction, a resultative construction with *kriegen* plus AP (adjectival phrase) has occurred (s. 3e). From this resultative *kriegen* plus AP, the resultative

⁵ Stephan Elspaß (Augsburg) who kindly offered me his letter collection for my analysis used the “Nordamerika-Briefsammlung” to arrange his corpus (<http://www.auswandererbriefe.de>).

construction plus past participle whose origin seems to date back in the second half of the 15th century (s. 3f) can be derived.

Whereas all *kriegen* variants mentioned so far have a more agentive-causative reading, variants with a passive reading can also be detected from Early New High German onwards (s. 4). For at least the last 650 years, *kriegen* plus NP has also had a non-agentive interpretation in the sense of ‘getting something without effort’ (s. 4a). The recipient passive (s. 4b) can be seen as a further development of this transitive *kriegen* with a passive reading. The first occurrences of a *kriegen* passive can be traced back to the end of the 16th century (cf. Eroms 1978: 365).

(4) Examples of passive *kriegen* variants in Modern German

- (a) *kriegen* + NP: *Ich kriege Halsschmerzen.*
‘I am getting a sore throat’
- (b) *kriegen* + NP + past part.: *Er kriegt seine Banane weggenommen.*
‘He is getting his banana taken away’

Similar grammaticalization paths can be found for *bekommen* whose starting point is a motion verb with the Old High German meaning of ‘to come from/to’, ‘to descend from’, and later also ‘to seize’, ‘to occur’ or ‘to prosper’. In Middle High German, a transitive *bekommen* with transfer semantics developed from the intransitive origin. Like *kriegen*, transitive *bekommen* has developed variants with a more agentive meaning on the one hand, and variants with a more passive reading on the other hand. Both paths led to the aforementioned constructions with past participle, the resultative construction and the recipient passive, respectively. The first occurrence of a recipient passive with the auxiliary *bekommen* is found in 1626 (cf. Glaser 2005 : 45). Hence, the recipient passive is a rather recent phenomenon which has continuously been integrated into the system of German passive constructions over the last 400 years. Whereas former editions of the “Duden Grammatik” characterized this construction as a “substitution form of the passive” (*Ersatzform des Passivs*, Duden 1959: 117), “variant of the passive” (*Variante des Passivs*, Duden 1973: 95) or “competition form of the event passive” (*Konkurrenzform des Vorgangspassivs*, Duden 1984: 183ff), the newest edition (Duden 2005: 474–477) evaluates the three passive forms in (2) as almost equivalent, at least in the case of ditransitive transfer verbs.

2.2 GET-passives in Luxembourgish and Dutch

Besides German, two other continental West Germanic languages were included in this analysis, namely Luxembourgish and Dutch. The selection of these two languages was last but not least motivated by their geographic and linguistic proximity, to Germany and German. The linguistic mutuality also becomes obvious with regard to the genera verbi of the three languages concerned. Like German, Luxembourgish provides three passive

forms resembling the German types, namely an event passive constructed with the auxiliary *ginn* ‘to give’, a state passive with the auxiliary *sin* ‘to be’ and finally a recipient passive by means of the auxiliary *kréien* ‘to get’. According to Schanen (2006: 220), the *kréien* passive – « le passif de la ‘personne intéressée’ » (Schanen 1980: 492) – serves to place the agent in the background in favour of the semantic role of the dative object (s. 5b). Comparably, the construction with *ginn* (‘to give’) plus past participle (s. 5a) is used to highlight the role of the direct (accusative) object. For Schanen (cf. 2006: 220), one general condition for the existence of a *kréien* passive is the presence of a trivalent lexical verb allowing argument reduction.

- (5) Luxembourgish event and recipient passive
- (a) *ginn* (‘to give’) passive (event passive)
D’Buch gött dem Jong (vun der Schwëster) geschenkt.
‘the book is being presented to the boy (by his sister)’
- (b) *kréien* (‘to get’) passive (recipient passive)
De Jong kritt d’Buch (vun der Schwëster) geschenkt.
‘the boy is getting the book presented (by his sister)’

Even though the history of the Luxembourgish *kréien* passive has not yet been analyzed, there is evidence for the hypothesis that the Luxembourgish *kréien* passive has run through grammaticalization channels similar to the German *kriegen* passive.⁶ But whereas German has developed two highly frequent auxiliaries (in addition to the rarely used *erhalten* ‘to obtain’), *kréien* is the only auxiliary of the Luxembourgish recipient passive. *Bekommen* (‘to receive’), which can frequently be found in the German standard language and other varieties, has only limited semantics and functions in Luxembourgish. The “Luxembourgish Dictionary” only mentions an intransitive *bekommen* variant in the sense of ‘digestible’ (LuxWb 1950/1954: 88). Hence, Luxembourgish *kréien* has no strong competitor in the recipient passive or in other GET contexts. Its high frequency accompany an obvious morphological irregularity.

Whereas the status of the recipient passives in German and Luxembourgish as “real” passive forms is nowadays (more or less) uncontroversial, the similar Dutch construction with *krijgen* plus past participle is referred to as “semi passive” in contrast to the “real” passive (cf. E-ANS 18.5.2.4·ii, 22.4.2.1). At least in Standard Dutch, this construction seems to be mostly restricted to main verbs meaning a transfer of objects in the widest sense, like *aanbieden* ‘to offer so. sth.’, *brengen* ‘to bring so. sth.’, *betalen* ‘to pay so. for sth.’, *schenken* ‘to present so. sth.’, *onthouden* ‘to deprive so. of sth.’ and *ontnemen* ‘to take sth. from so.’. But as Broekhuis/Cornips (1994) point out, there are other (non-standard) Dutch varieties in which other lexical verbs can also be used to construct the *krijgen*-passive: In Heerlen Dutch, beneficiary and possessive datives may also occur as subjects of the *krijgen*-passive (s. 6).

⁶ We will come back to this hypothesis within the context of the speech production experiment (section 4).

Like Luxembourgish, Dutch only provides one semi-auxiliary for the semi-passive, namely *krijgen*. The history of this *krijgen* construction and of *krijgen* variants in general has recently been analyzed by Landsbergen (2006). On the basis of his historical data, (at least) two variants of *krijgen* can be identified around 1300: an intransitive variant in the sense of ‘to fight, to strive for, to proceed to’ and a transitive variant meaning ‘to obtain by effort’. Through the ages, the intransitive use has gradually disappeared, whereas the transitive variants have increased. In the 14th century, *krijgen* was also used as a causative verb combined with an object and a full prepositional phrase denoting locations. The meaning can be identified as ‘to make object X move to location or state Y’ like English *get* + NP + PP (*I got him to London*). *Krijgen* in combination with adjective phrases can be found by the middle of the 16th century (for example, Modern Dutch *kapot/kleinkrijgen* ‘to break so.’). It is followed by occurrences of *krijgen* plus past participle. Over the last 400 years, two formally similar but semantically different constructions with *krijgen* plus past participle have emerged in Dutch, one with a resultative meaning (for example, Modern Dutch *gedaan krijgen* ‘to manage sth.’), the other with a semi-passive meaning. According to Landsbergen (2006), the semi-passive developed from the resultative *krijgen* at the beginning of the 20th century. The results of the speech production experiment presented in section 4 will raise the question to what extent the grammaticalization channels formulated for the German recipient passive might also hold for an alternatively hypothesized pathway of the Dutch semi passive.

(6) Examples from Heerlen Dutch (from Broekhuis/Cornips 1994: 178)

(a) *worden* (‘to become’) passive (event passive)

De tuin werd hem (door mij) omgespit.
‘the garden was digged up for him (by me)’

(b) *krijgen* (‘to get’) passive (semi passive)

Hij kreeg de tuin (van mij) omgespit.
‘he got the garden digged up (by me)’

3. Results from a cross-linguistic speech production experiment

3.1. Theoretical and methodological background

To date, empirical research on GET constructions (like many syntactic features in general) has faced some critical methodological problems: If the analysis is based on non-elicited and non-controlled linguistic data, the frequencies of the phenomenon to be analyzed are often too low. The occurrence of GET-passives in written German, Luxembourgish and Dutch data or in spoken language data is more or less a “stroke of luck” depending on the existence of a recipient, on the given topic/comment structure and on the perspective and perspectivization of the speaker. In order to overcome these methodological problems, I designed a speech production experiment to collect reliable

empirical data which could form the basis for the cross-linguistic analysis of the verbal perspectivization of the recipient role. In the experiment, videoclips were used as stimuli. They were conceived first of all to develop scenarios in which the main actor was a recipient, beneficiary or maleficiary. Second, the scenes were designed to evoke the cognitive accentuation of this main actor as a *figure*, “a substructure perceived as ‘standing out’ from the remainder (the ground) and accorded special prominence as the pivotal entity around which the scene is organized and for which it provides a setting” (Langacker 1987: 120). The crucial hypothesis guiding the conception of the video clips was the contention

that there is a strong connection between the cognitive and the verbal perspectivization of propositions. [...] In the verbalization of a proposition, a speaker will name certain situational roles while masking others. Linguistically speaking, he will put the roles selected in a specific figure-ground-arrangement. The theme/rheme-structure which determines the discourse functional aspects of the sentence is to be distinguished from this sentence-oriented role perspectivization.

(Dürscheid 1999: 7, 18; translation by A.N.L)⁷

The 18 video clips are structured as follows:⁸ in the centre of each video clip, the same (male) person is assuming the role of recipient, beneficiary or maleficiary. A second person, also involved in the action and bearing the thematic role of an agent, is not fully shown or appears only partially (e.g., hands, tools or the like). The scene description in (7) exemplifies the contents of the clips:

(7) Screenplay of the video “having glasses placed onto the nose”

A male is sitting at a table. He is looking ahead into the camera which is positioned at eye-level. From the left (from the camera’s or viewer’s point of view, respectively) two hands holding glasses appear and place the glasses onto the man’s nose.

The informants’ task was to give a one-sentence reply to the question “What’s happening to the man in the following video clip?”. The concrete formulation of the question to be answered was motivated by the abovementioned function of “argument restructuring” of passive constructions (cf. Zifonun [et al] 1997: 1849ff). By means of the question “What’s happening to the man?”, the recipient (beneficiary or maleficiary,

⁷ German translation of: „dass ein enger Zusammenhang zwischen der kognitiven und der sprachlichen Perspektivierung von Sachverhalten besteht. [...] Ein Sprecher wird bestimmte Situationsrollen in der Verbalisierung des Sachverhalts nennen, andere ausblenden. Die ausgewählten Rollen wird er sprachlich in eine spezifische Figur-Grund-Anordnung bringen. Von dieser satzbezogenen Rollenperspektivierung zu unterscheiden ist die Thema-Rhema-Gliederung, mit der der Satz nach diskursfunktionalen Gesichtspunkten bestimmt wird.“ (DÜRSCHIED 1999, pp. 7 and 18)

⁸ I would like to thank Christoph Purschke, Franziska Kretschmar and Matthias Katerbow (all from Marburg/Germany) who served as actors.

respectively) was explicitly forced as topic of the scene description and therefore, the theme/rheme-structure was consciously affected. The answer was to be given in the form of a single but complete sentence written down on a questionnaire form. Besides the scene descriptions, additional social data were collected by means of a questionnaire (e.g., current and former places of residence, dialect competences, origins of parents and others). It is important to mention that the informants were not briefed on the real aim of the experiment before the end of the data collection.

Up to now, the speech production experiment has been conducted in five different countries: Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Netherlands and Luxembourg. The results presented here are based on the scene descriptions of 394 native speakers of German (n = 301), Dutch (n = 67) and Luxembourgish (n = 26). All informants are students of linguistics who were grown up and used to live in the same dialect area as their university.⁹

(8) Numbers of informants

University (town)	Dialect area	Language
Kiel (n = 156)	Low German	GERMAN
Trier (n = 67) Saarbrücken (n = 28)	Central German	
Bern (n = 21) Wien (n = 29)	Upper German	
Groningen (n = 67)	Low Saxon	
Luxembourg (n = 26)		LUXEMBOURGISH

3.2 Analysis of the German data

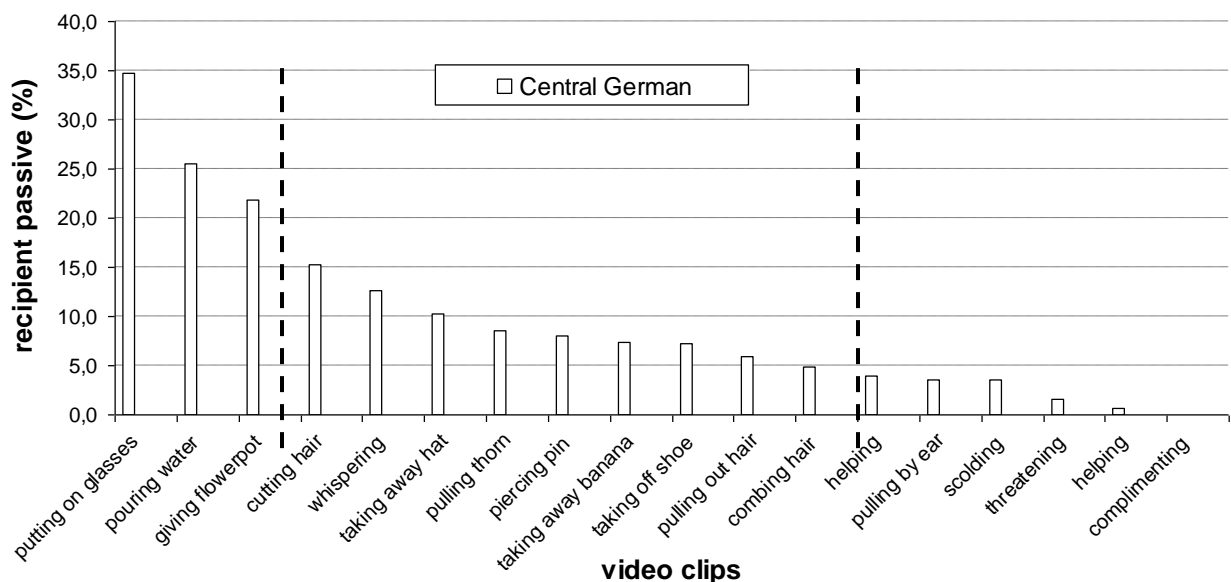
The German informants' sample consists of 301 students from the three major dialect areas of German. Whereas the Low German area is only represented by students from Kiel, the Central and Upper German data were surveyed in Trier and Saarbrücken which are located in the West Central German area and hence in the core dialectal region of the German recipient passive. In contrast, Alemannic Bern and Bavarian Vienna are situated in Upper German which, according to previous corpus analyses, is the dialect area with the weakest distribution of the passive construction (cf. Lenz 2007b and 2008).

I will start out with an overview of the scene descriptions of the Central German students from Trier and Saarbrücken. The relative frequencies of their recipient passives is represented by the bars on the diagram in (9) which are arranged by their height and not by their chronological order during the experiment. The higher the bar, the more

⁹ Thanks to Christina Ada Anders, Michael Elementaler, Markus Hundt and Alexander Lasch (Kiel), Angelika Braun (Trier), Ulrike Demske (Saarbrücken), Franz Patocka (Wien), Beat Siebenhaar (Bern), Charlotte Gooskens, Sebastian Kürschner and Muriel Norde (Groningen), Peter Gilles and Melanie Wagner (Luxembourg) who helped me collecting the data.

recipient passives were produced in the answers to the question “What’s happening to the man?”. With the exception of one video (“complimenting”), all clips evoke the realization of recipient passives, at different frequencies between 0.6% and 34.8%, however. Only three video clips evoked frequencies over 20%, namely the clips in which our main actor is getting a pair of glasses (put on his nose), is getting water poured into his glass and is getting presented with a pot of flowers. The scene descriptions of these three clips mostly feature ditransitive German verbs expressing the concrete transfer of a thing.¹⁰ Since getting a glass of water, glasses or a pot of flowers usually are actions to the benefit of the receiving person, our recipient is coincidentally a beneficiary of the concrete transferential act.

(9) Frequencies (%) of recipient passives by West Central German students



In a second group of video clips, graphically separated by means of dotted lines, this coincidence of the two semantic roles, recipient and beneficiary, is not as strong as in the three video clips with the highest frequencies of recipient passives: Despite the fact, that in the video stimuli “whispering (something into his ear)” and “sticking a pin (into his finger)” our main actor is receiving something, the transfer is a mental one (he is receiving words) or the man is in the position of maleficiary (hurt by a pin), respectively. In the clips “taking away his hat (from his head)” and “taking away his banana (out of his hand)”, a concrete transfer of possession is also illustrated, but now with a transferred entity moving away from the man. Since our man is obviously angry about the removal, he is undoubtedly in the position of a maleficiary. Similar situations

¹⁰ Clip “putting on glasses”: mostly *aufsetzen* ‘to put on’; clip “pouring in water’: *einschenken/nachschenken*, *einschütten*, *eingießen*, *auffüllen/einfüllen* and others; clip “giving a pot of flowers”: *geben* ‘to give’, *reichen* ‘to hand’, *schchenken* ‘to present’ and others.

are presented in the other video clips of the second group: Although we are mostly dealing with ditransitive verb constructions here, our actor is not a recipient in a prototypical sense. Sometimes he is a suffering recipient, sometimes the action shown is not really a concrete transfer of an object from one person to another (e.g., “taking off (but not away) his shoes”, “combing hair”).

Whereas most scene descriptions of the two video groups described above contain ditransitive verbs, three clips of the third group isolated in (10) evoke dative verbs: (2x) *jemandem helfen* ‘to help somebody’ and *jemandem drohen* ‘to threaten somebody’. Although a recipient passive of a dative verb is (still?) evaluated as non-standard in current reference books, at least some Central German students already realized this phenomenon in their written scene description. Besides the three clips mostly described by means of dative verbs, two other videos belong to the third group of stimuli: “pulling his ear” and “scolding” *schimpfen*.¹¹ The only video which did not evoke a single recipient passive is the clip “complimenting” in which our actor is being complimented by another person. The German verb *loben*, which was mostly used to describe this scene, represents the class of monotransitive verbs (accusative verbs without a dative complement) which seem not to be candidates for a recipient passive. Examples of recipient passives evoked by the experiment and realized by West Central German students are given in (10).

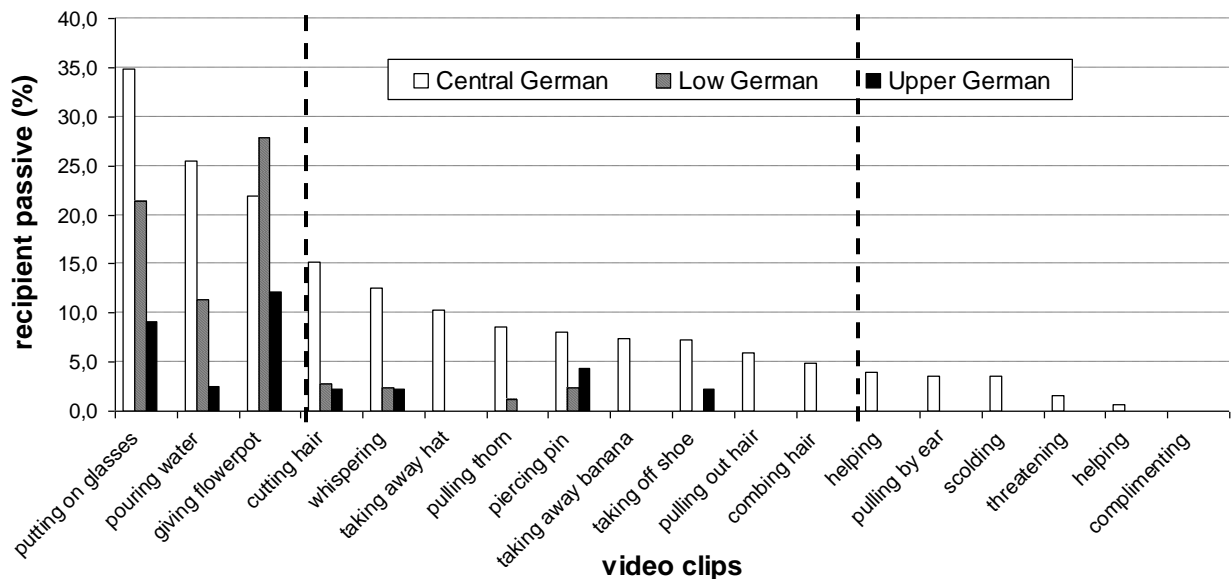
- (10) Recipient passives written by West Central German students (examples)
- (a) *Er bekommt eine Brille auf die Nase gesetzt.*
‘He is getting glasses placed onto his nose’
 - (b) *Er bekommt Wasser in sein Glas eingeschenkt.*
‘He is getting water poured into his glass’
 - (c) *Er bekommt etwas ins Ohr geflüstert.*
‘He is getting something whispered into his ear’
 - (d) *Er bekommt seine Banane weggenommen.*
‘He is getting his banana taken away’
 - (e) *Er bekommt seinen Schuh ausgezogen.*
‘He is getting his shoe taken off’
 - (f) *Er bekommt (beim Aufstehen) geholfen.*
‘He is getting helped with standing up’
 - (g) *Er bekommt geschimpft.*
‘He is getting scolded’

¹¹ Current German reference books classify *schimpfen* in combination with a PP (*mit jemandem schimpfen*) as the standard variant whereas *schimpfen* plus an accusative NP (*jemanden schimpfen*) is evaluated as regionally marked („landschaftlich“).

In (11), the Central German data are compared to the Low German results represented by dotted bars on the diagram. Altogether, the Low German students produce fewer recipient passives than the Central German informants. Nevertheless, we can detect the same video clusters in both areas. In Kiel, the first group of video clips evoked recipient passive frequencies between 10 and 30%; as for the second group of clips only four out of nine clips evoked very low frequencies under 6%. Finally, the Low German scene descriptions of the third group of video clips show not a single recipient passive.

In addition to the Low and Central German data, the diagram in (11) also contains the frequencies of recipient passive realized by Upper German informants from Bern (Switzerland) and Vienna (Austria). The Upper German students clearly show the lowest frequencies of *kriegen/bekommen*-passives; only the first cluster of video clips, in which our main figure acts as a recipient in the prototypical sense, evoked some slightly higher frequencies. With regard to the second group of clips, only four of them were described by means of some few Upper German recipient passives. Similar to the Low German informants, the Upper German students avoided recipient passives for the description of the third video group.

(11) Frequencies (%) of recipient passives by German students



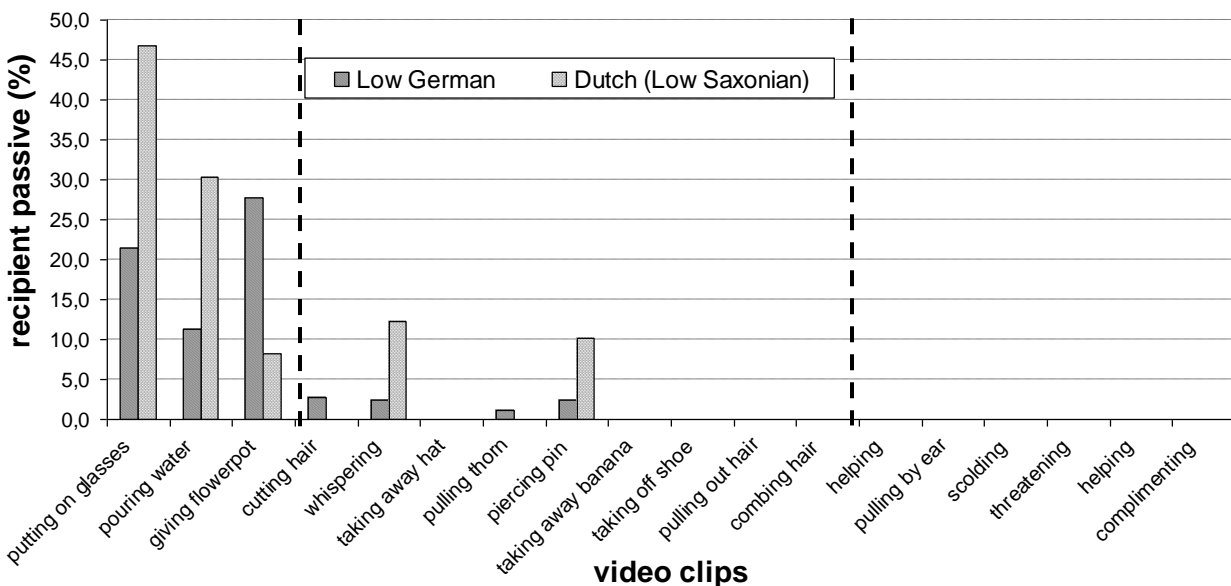
As expected, the most common auxiliary of the recipient passives produced in all written scene descriptions is *bekommen*. Occurrences of *kriegen* are very rare, and *erhalten* did not occur. Since all video clips evoked recipient passives at frequencies under 40%, the majority of scene descriptions consisted of alternative constructions. The competing constructions of the German resultative passive are mostly active constructions (e.g., *Er bekommt Wasser in sein Glas* 'he is getting water into his glass')

and the event passive with the auxiliary *werden* ‘to become’ (*Ihm wird Wasser eingeschenkt* ‘water is being poured (into a glass) for him’).

3.3 Analysis of the Dutch and Luxembourgish data

The aim of this section is to compare the German results sketched above with the Luxembourgish and Dutch data. For this purpose, scene descriptions by students from the universities of Groningen and Luxembourg are analyzed. Whereas the Luxembourgish students are from very different parts of Luxembourg, the Dutch data presented here are only from students who grew up in the Northern part of the Netherlands (mostly in the Low Saxonian dialect area). As a first step, the frequencies of Dutch “semi-passives” are compared to their German neighbours from Kiel (cf. 12).

(12) Frequencies (%) of recipient passives by North German and North Dutch students



As the comparison reveals, the Dutch students show higher frequencies than the Low German students but these frequencies were evoked by fewer video clips. Whereas in Kiel seven video stimuli were described by means of *bekommen/kriegen*-passives, only five videos effected *krijgen*-passives by the Groningen students. There is only one video clip (of the first group) whose description resulted in higher frequencies in Kiel than in Groningen, i.e. the video “giving a pot of flowers“. In order to explain this exception, a look at alternative constructions beside the GET-passives is helpful. A detailed analysis of the Dutch scene descriptions reveals that the Groningen students preferred active sentences like *hij krijgt een plantje* ‘he is getting a plant’ to describe the video “giving a pot of flowers“. Similarly to a *krijgen*-passive, this type of active construction allows our recipient to be in the subject position. But in comparison to a GET passive, an active sentence with the recipient as the subject is a structurally “easier”

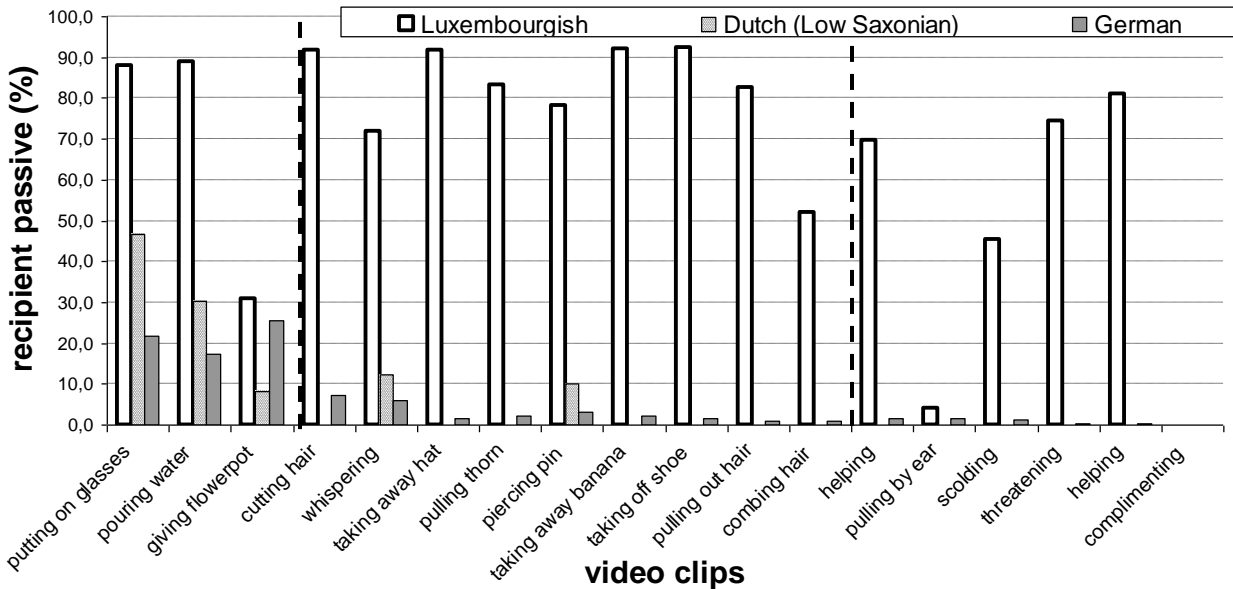
and therefore a potentially more favoured construction than the alternative GET passive. At least in the case of the video “giving a pot of flowers”, the Low German students showed lower frequencies of this type of active sentences and realized more recipient passives instead.

(13) Recipient passives written by Dutch students (examples)

- (a) *Hij krijgt een bloemetje geschonken.*
 ‘He is getting a pot of flowers presented to him’
- (b) *Hij krijgt een bril op zijn neus gezet.*
 ‘He is getting glasses put on his nose’
- (c) *Hij krijgt een glas water ingeschonken.*
 ‘He is getting a glass of water poured for him’

With regard to the second cluster of clips, the Dutch students verbalized semi-passives only in the cases of the videos in which a concrete thing is transferred to our main actor independently of the fact that he might be a maleficiary hurt by a pin. In order to gain deeper insights into the regional distribution of the *krijgen*-passive within the entire Dutch language area in Belgium and the Netherlands, further data will need to be collected.

(14) Frequencies (%) of recipient passives by German, Dutch and Luxembourgish students



In (14), the Luxembourgish data are taken into consideration and compared to the Dutch and German students (the Germans are collapsed into one group). The diagram

reveals obvious differences between the three languages analysed. The largest differences occur with regard to the Luxembourgish students who can be clearly distinguished from their German and Dutch neighbours. The diagram suggests the productivity and popularity of the Luxembourgish *kréien*-passive. Only three video clips stand out by displaying strikingly lower frequencies: Similar to the Dutch students, the Luxembourgish informants mostly preferred a simple active sentence with our recipient as the subject in order to describe the scene “giving a pot of flowers”: *Hie kritt ee Blummestack* ‘He is getting a pot of flowers’. With regard to the video clip “pulling an ear”, most Luxembourgish students used a *ginn* ‘give’ passive instead of a *kréien*-passive. This can be explained by the fact that in most Luxembourgish descriptions of this scene, the subject of the passive sentences corresponds to an accusative (*ihn am Ohr ziehen* ‘to pull him (ACC) by the ear’) and not to a dative (*ihm am Ohr ziehen* ‘to pull him (DAT) by the ear’). The only video without any recipient passive by the Luxembourgish students is the aforementioned video *complimenting*. Even in Luxembourgish, monotransitive verb with a mere accusative NP are not candidates for the recipient passive. The scene descriptions of this video clip are mostly verbalized by means of *ginn* ‘give’ passives.

(15) Recipient passives written by Luxembourgish students (examples)

- (a) *Hie(n) kritt ee Brëll ugedoen.*
‘He is getting glasses put on (placed onto his nose)’
- (b) *Hie(n) kritt Waaser an e Glas geschott.*
‘He is getting water poured into a glass’
- (c) *Hie(n) kritt um Ouer gezunn.*
‘He is getting pulled by his ear’
- (d) *Hie(n) kritt ebbes an d’Ouer gepëspert.*
‘He is getting something whispered into his ear’
- (e) *Hij krijgt d’Hoër geschnidden.*
‘He is getting his hair cut’
- (f) *Hie(n) kritt en Hutt ausgedoen.*
‘He is getting his hat taken off’
- (g) *Hie(n) kritt gehollef de Mantel unzedoen.*
‘He is getting helped with putting on his coat’

4. Summary and outlook

The focus of this article has been the perspectivization of the recipient role in three continental West Germanic languages: German, Luxembourgish and Dutch. The discussion has concentrated on GET (semi-) passives which in these three languages can be used to perspectivize the thematic role of the indirect object. In addition to the

(prototypical) recipient role, the semantic role of the indirect object can also be a mere beneficiary (who is positively involved in the action) or a maleficiary (who suffers from the action). Data from a speech production experiment were used as an empirical basis for the discussion. They support the following hypotheses which hold for written language use: In all three languages, GET (semi-) passives can be used to perspectivize the recipient, beneficiary or maleficiary role. But the frequency of use and the number of construction possibilities are clearly different. Among the three languages compared, Luxembourgish is definitely the language featuring the highest frequencies and productivity of *kréien*-passives. Here, ditransitive and also dative verbs can be used to form the recipient passive which in most video clips was produced by the majority of informants. With regard to the German language area, clear areal differences between the North, the Centre and the South became obvious. The synchronic variation observed in the comparison of different regional groups of informants can be interpreted as different diachronic grammaticalization steps of the German recipient passive. Whereas the construction can be used with ditransitive and dative verbs in the West Middle area, the recipient passive is restricted to ditransitive verbs in Low German and Upper German. Among the ditransitive verbs, only main verbs expressing a concrete transfer of possession to the recipient evoke higher frequencies of recipient passives in the northern and southern of German language area, whereas the passive construction with a mere beneficiary/maleficiary as subject is rather infrequent. Rather similar preferences of ditransitiva with transferential semantics are observed in Dutch, though the results here only hold for North Holland. In contrast to their North German neighbours, the Low Saxon informants from the North Netherlands realized a semi passive only in the case of a prototypical recipient, i.e., in the case of transferential verbs with a movement of the transferred entity towards the perspectivized figure. In these cases, however, their frequencies of use are even higher. Taken together, the results presented here support the hypothesis that the three West Germanic languages and – at least with regard to German – their different dialect areas show different steps within the diachrony of the GET passive constructions. Whereas Luxembourgish clearly ranks first, the development of the construction seems to be decelerated in German and Dutch. But despite these differences, the obvious synchronic parallels between the GET-passives in the three languages provide evidence for the hypothesis that their GET passive constructions also share diachronic similarities.

It will be the goal of further research to find evidence to support these and other hypotheses. The results of the speech production experiment motivate further data collection by this method. They will be also used to gain detailed insights not only into the regional distribution of the Dutch “semi passive” but also into spoken language use. By collecting spoken scene descriptions from German, Dutch and Luxembourgish informants, a medial (spoken versus written) comparison of the experiment will be possible.

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