

The Passive and the Indefinite-personal Construction in Slavic

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1.0 Introduction

In this paper we shall examine the function of the indefinite-personal construction (неопределённо-личное предложение in Russian; henceforth IDPC) in some current Slavic languages. This construction, which is morphologically characterized by the forms of verbal endings in the third person plural and the "omission" of the subject pronoun, "gives the statement a force similar to that which is expressed in French by the pronoun 'on' and in German by 'man'" (Unbegaun 1957:283).

In section 2 below we will briefly observe several types of "canonical" passives in Slavic, and in section 3 we will remark the similarity between the impersonal passive and the IDPC in that each of them have no agents as its subject, and then we will characterize the IDPC as a kind of impersonal passive in a broad sense. Furthermore, a new framework of the passive in Slavic which permits to relate the IDPC to other passives in form as well as in function will be proposed on the basis of the passive prototype presented in recent works on typology.

In section 4 we will survey the relation between the passive and topicalization with a particular reference to the word order. Finally some arguments are shown about the individual passive constructions in Slavic.

2.0 The canonical passives in Slavic

2.1 The personal passive

The passive constructions in Slavic can be divided into two types, i.e. constructions with the reflexive verb forms (henceforth RFs) and those with the periphrastic forms composed of the participles and the copulative verbs (PFs). A transitive verb construction in Czech, for instance, generally has both RFs and PFs as corresponding passive:

(1) a. Ta rezoluce *se* už *projednávala*.
that resolution RF already discussed:IPFV

b. Ta rezoluce *byla* už *projednávána*.
was PF.IPFV

'The resolution was already discussed.'

(2) a. Ta rezoluce *se* už *projednála*.
RF PFV

b. Ta rezoluce *byla* už *projednána*.
was PF.PFV

'The resolution had been already discussed.'

There is, however, a tendency that RF is preferred when the verb is imperfective while PF tends to be combined with a perfective verb (Grepl 1987:344; Siewierska 1988:259). This preference is much more remarkable in Russian: here it is impossible to make a PF from an imperfective verb or an RF from a perfective verb:¹

(3) a. Одна книга *писалась*/**написалась* мной.
one book wrote:RF.IPFV/PFV me:INST

'A book was being written by me.'

b. Одна книга **писана*/*написана* мной.
written:PF.IPFV/PFV

'A book has been written by me.'

In Polish a passive with a PF can be constructed from any verb regardless of its aspect. If the verb is perfective, the copulative verb of the construction may be either *zostać*, etymologically "to become", or *być* "to be"; the former describes the result of an action while the latter the completion of an action:

- (4) a. *Miasto było budowane/zbudowane.*
 city was built:PF.IPFV/PFV
 'The city was being/had been built.'
- b. *Miasto zostało zbudowane.*
 city became built:PF.PFV
 'The city was built.'

The RF in Polish can compose a personal passive, but its use is relatively rare (Grepl 1987:346):

- (5) *Książka się drukuje.*
 book RF prints
 'A book is in print.'

The followings are examples of personal passives from some other Slavic languages. The examples (6), (7) and (9) are for RFs; (8) and (10) for PFs:

Slovak

- (6) *Pilo sa aj víno*
 drank:RF and wine
 'They also drank wine.'

Serbo-Croatian

- (7) *Knjiga se dobro prodaje.*
 book RF well sells
 'This book sells well.'

- (8) *Ohrabreni smo da nastavimo s istraživanjima.*
 encouraged:PF are:1PL COMP go-on with investigation
 'We are encouraged to go on with the investigation.'

Bulgarian

- (9) *Писмото се пишеше на японски език от него.*
 letter-the RF wrote on Japanese language by him
 'The letter was being written by him in Japanese.'
- (10) *Писмо беше писано от него.*
 letter was written:PF by him
 'A letter was written by him.'

2.2 The impersonal passive

While the passive constructions can be classified according to the form of the predicate as observed above, they can also be divided according to its other characteristic. All the passive constructions

cited so far have a subject which would be the direct object in the corresponding active construction, and the finite verbs of course agree with it in gender, number and person. Besides that some Slavic languages have a construction which has a direct object and no overt subject, and where the verbal ending is that of the third person singular in present tense or that of the neuter singular in past tense. Such a construction is called the impersonal passive. Its use is particularly widespread in Polish:

- (11) *Pracę rozpoczyna się bardzo wcześnie.*
 work:ACC begins:RF.3.SG very early
 'The work starts very early.'
- (12) *Pokrywało się dachę.*
 roofs:RF.3.SG.N roof:ACC
 'The house was roofed.'

The impersonal passive can be derived not only from transitive verbs but also from intransitive verbs. In (13) *tego wyrazu* is an object in the genitive case, not in the accusative case, and (14) has no object at all.

- (13) *Tego wyrazu używało się dawniej często.*
 this word:GEN used:RF once often
 'This word was once often used.'
- (14) *Mówiono wiele na ten temat.*
 spoken:PF much:ADV on this theme
 'Much was spoken on this theme.'

In Ukrainian it is possible to form both personal and impersonal passives with PF, although there is a difference between them in that the former represents the completion of an action whereas the latter the result of it:

- (15) a. *Робота закінчна.*
 work:F.NOM finished:PF.F
 'The work was done.'
- b. *Роботу закінчено.*
 work:ACC finished:PF.N
 'The work has been done.'

RFs from intransitive verbs are formed in a restricted way in Russian. If formed at all, they are mostly derived from verbs of communication (Grepl 1987:347):

- (16) Об этом (много) уже упоминалось.
 about this much already mentioned:RF
 'Much was mentioned already about this.'

Timberlake (1976) has shown some peculiarities of the passives in North Russian dialects. In addition to the personal passive (17) like Standard Russian, the impersonal passive can be formed from an intransitive verb (18) as well as from a transitive verb (19):

- (17) У рыбака был схвачен медвежий язык.
 by fisherman was:M.SG caught:PF.M.SG bear's tongue:M.SG
 'By the fisherman was caught a bear's tongue.' (p.551)
- (18) У меня было телёнка зарезано.
 by me was:N.SG calf:M.ACC slaughtered:PF.N.SG
 'By me there's been slaughtered a calf.' (p.550)
- (19) У меня уже встало было.
 by me already gotten-up:PF.N.SG was:N.SG
 'I have already gotten up.' (p.549)

The impersonal passive is formed even from reflexive verbs with no accusative object (p.549):

- (20) Было записанось в школу-то у меня.
 was registered:PF-RF into school by me
 'There was signing myself up at school by me.'

Moreover, there is a possibility that the 'underlying' object may be expressed in the nominative case without producing agreement in the predicate (pp.550-51):

- (21) Переехано было дорога тут.
 crossed:PF.N.SG was:N.SG road:NOM.F.SG there
 'There's been crossing over the road there.'
- (22) У лисицу унесено курочка.
 by fox carried:PF.N.SG chicken.NOM.F.SG
 'By the fox was carried off a chicken.'

Such constructions may be considered as an intermediate stage between personal and impersonal passives.

3.0 Indefinite-personal construction as passive

3.1 IDPC and canonical passives

In Russian RFs are used when the verb is imperfective as mentioned above, but not all the imperfective verbs have a corresponding RF with passive meaning. The RF from *любить* 'to love', for instance, cannot be used as a passive:

- (23) a. Все любят розы.
 all love:3PL rose:ACC
 'All love roses.'
- b. *Роза любит² всеми.
 rose:NOM loves:RF.3SG all:INS
 ('Roses are loved by all.')

In this case a construction with a predicate for the third person plural or an indefinite-personal construction (IDPC) is used:

- (24) Розу любят.
 rose:ACC love:3PL
 'The roses are loved.'

IDPCs can replace RFs or PFs even when a canonical passive can be formed (Grep1 1987:336):

- (25) a. По радио передаются последние известия.
 on radio broadcast:PF latest news:NOM
- b. По радио передают последние известия.
 broadcast:3PL ACC
- 'The latest news is broadcast on the radio.'

These constructions are found in other Slavic languages as well:

Czech

- (26) Petra odsoudili k smrti.
 Petr:ACC sentenced:3PL to death
 'Petr was sentenced to death.'

Polish

- (27) W niektórych sklepach sprzedają "Pepsi-Colę".
 in any stores sell:PFV.3PL Pepsi-Cola:ACC

'Pepsi-Cola will be sold in any stores.'

Slovak

(28) *Vylúčili* ho zo školy.
 expelled:3PL him:ACC from school

'He was expelled from school.'

Bulgarian

(29) Петре, ела да видим какви обувки продават!
 Petur:VOC come:IMPER COMP see:1PL what shoes sell:3PL

'Petur, let's go and see what shoes are sold!'

The IDPCs convey a trait of the colloquial style and are commonly used in Russian, Czech and Slovak, while in Polish they are used in a limited way (Grepl 1987:345-347).

It is indeed possible to think of the IDPC merely as a construction with omission of the third person plural subject. Nevertheless, they can be considered to be a passive, for there are two properties in form that the IDPC and the impersonal passive have in common: the lack of the agent, and the unmarkedness of the predicate. Thus the IDPC is similar to the impersonal passive not only from the functional but also from the formal point of view.

A classification has been made which divides impersonal passives found in natural languages into four broad groups on the basis of the presence or absence of a form word in the subject position, and the type of verbal morphology used (Siewierska 1984:93-95):

- a. No overt subject and verbal morphology distinct from that of the active.
- b. A 'dummy' subject and verbal morphology distinct from that of the active.
- c. No overt subject and active verbal morphology.
- d. A 'dummy' subject and active verbal morphology.

Most of impersonal passives in Slavic are of the type a. and the IDPC seems to belong to the type d. as the French *on*-construction, the German *man*-construction and the Italian *uno*-construction do. It is, therefore, necessary to devise a new framework in which all the personal passive, the impersonal passive and the IDPC will be equally

treated as "passives". A proposal will be given in 3.3 below.

3.2 Agent defocusing and the passive

Apart from the developments in formal syntax such as Transformational Generative Grammar or Relational Grammar, voice phenomena have figured prominently in the field of linguistic typology as well. Shibatani (1985) claims that the primary pragmatic function of passives is that of "agent defocusing" and proposes a characterization of the passive prototype (p.837):

Characterization of the passive prototype

- a. Primary pragmatic function: Defocusing of agent.
- b. Semantic properties:
 - (i) Semantic valence: Predicate (agent, patient).
 - (ii) Subject is affected.
- c. Syntactic properties:
 - (i) Syntactic encoding: agent $\rightarrow \emptyset$ (not encoded).
patient \rightarrow subject.
 - (ii) Valence of P[redicate]: Active = P/n;
Passive = P/n-1.
- d. Morphological property:
Active = P;
Passive = P[+passive].

This framework has an advantage of appropriately embracing the impersonal passive in it.

Grepl (1987:337) also rightly argues that "the common functional invariant of all the RFs, PFs and the transposed forms of the 3rd Pers. Pl. [= IDPCs] rests in their ability to construct clauses in which the agent, implied in the semantic structure of the predicate, cannot be situated in the syntactic position of the subject" and calls this process of the ousting of the agent from the position of the subject "deagentization". The author, however, does not refer to any internal relations between the deagentive constructions.

3.3 The system of passives in Slavic

Now we will propose a new system of passives in Slavic in the light of the passive prototype mentioned above. Of all the passive constructions most prototypical is the personal passive in which the subject of the corresponding active construction (the agent) becomes an instrumental or a prepositional phrase or is deleted, and the object (the patient) becomes a new subject. The predicate is either RF or PF in this case, thus the demotion of the subject is indicated clearly. The personal passive is found in all the Slavic languages and seems to be fundamental.

Besides the personal passive subject there is another possibility that the construction without any subject is used when the object is not promoted or there is no object in the construction at all. We will call such constructions having passive meaning without any overt subject the impersonal passives in a broad sense. The demotion of the subject may be either indicated or not by the predicate; if, on the one hand, indicated explicitly by some device, i.e. an RF or a PF, then we have an impersonal passive in a narrow sense, which is less prototypical than the personal passive. On the other hand, if the demotion is not indicated clearly, the predicate verb becomes the third person plural in form, hence an IDPC.³

The following will serve to illustrate the discussion above:

The passive constructions in Slavic

After the demotion of the subject:

1. If the object is promoted to be a new subject:

Personal passive (RF or PF).

2. If no new subject appears:

Impersonal passives in a broad sense.

- a. And if the demotion of the subject is indicated clearly:

Impersonal passive in a narrow sense (RF or PF).

- b. And if the demotion of the subject is not indicated:

Indefinite-personal construction.

N.B. The upper construction is a more prototypical passive.

This framework makes it easier to grasp the continuum from the personal passive through the impersonal passive in a narrow sense to the IDPC both in function and in form.

4.0 Passive and topicalization

4.1 Subject-prominent and topic-prominent languages

Li and Thompson (1976:459) notes that in some languages "the basic constructions manifest a topic-comment relation rather than a subject-predicate relation". According to their study, there are four basic types of languages (pp.459-60): (i) *Subject-prominent languages*, including Indo-European; (ii) *Topic-prominent languages*, including Chinese; (iii) *Subject-prominent and topic-prominent languages*, including Japanese and Korean; and (iv) *Neither subject-prominent nor topic-prominent languages*. It should be noted here that "[a]s with all typological distinctions, of course, it is clear that we are speaking of a continuum" (p.483).

Now examine the following examples from Mandarin, which are called the "pseudo-passive" in the same work (pp.479-80):

Mandarin

(30) Zhèi-jian xīnwén guǎngbō le.
 this-CLASSIFIER news broadcast ASPECT

'This news (topic), it has been broadcast.'

(31) Nèi -běn shū yǐjīng chūbǎn le.
 that-CLASSIFIER book already publish ASPECT

'That book (topic), it has already been published.'

Although there is no passive marking in these clauses and "there seem to be no processes which refer to subject and no surface clues by which a subject could be identified" (p.480), it is possible to treat the clause initial nouns as though subjects and interpret these clauses as passives.

It might be controversial to relate the "pseudo-passive" directly to the IDPC in Slavic. Yet these two constructions suggest some similarity between Slavic and what is called topic-prominent languages: of all the Indo-European languages Slavic is arguably one of

the most topic-prominent. The topic-prominent character of Slavic is also suggested by the fact that not only the passive constructions but also the word order is used as a device of topicalization and that there is no need for "dummy" subjects in impersonal constructions (see Li and Thompson 1976:467).

4.2 Topic and the word order in Slavic

Slavic have a relatively free word order, so any part of a clause can be topicalized by putting it in the clause initial position. For instance, "the following [somewhat sanguinary] question-and-answer pairs reflect the normal word order to be used in answer to that particular question" (Comrie 1981:78):

- Russian
(32) --Кто убил Машу? --Машу убила Таня.
who:NOM killed Masha:ACC Tanya:NOM
'--Who killed Masha? --Tanya killed Masha.'
- Кого Таня убила? --Таня убила Машу.
whom:ACC
'--Who did Tanya kill? --Tanya killed Masha.'
- Валя убила Наташу. --А Таня? --Таня убила Машу.
Valya:NOM Natasha:ACC
'--Valya killed Natasha. --What about Tanya? --Tanya killed Masha.'
- Валя убила Наташу. --А Машу? --Машу убила Таня.
'--Valya killed Natasha. --What about Masha? --Tanya killed Masha.'

Huszcza (1985:53) also remarks that "the boundary between the topic and the comment parts is, unlike Japanese, usually indicated by pause or word order" in Polish:

- (33) a. Verdi | skomponował muzykę do "Traviaty".⁴
Verdi:NOM composed music:ACC for Traviata
'Verdi composed the music for *La Traviata*.'
- b. Verdi skomponował | muzykę do "Traviaty".
'It is the music for *La Traviata* that Verdi composed.'
- c. Verdi skomponował muzykę | do "Traviaty".
'It is for *La Traviata* that Verdi composed the music.'

The fact is, however, that an IDPC can be used even when the agent is definite or can be specified from the context. For instance, in (37) it is not difficult to supplement the 'subject' of the verb *стали* (Kindaichi 1989:65):

(37) --У вас есть дети?

--Был один мальчик, но прожил неделю и умер.

Стали пить чай.
began:3PL drink:INF tea

'Do you have any children?' "I had a boy, but he died in a week." There began drinking tea.

Similarly in (38) we can easily infer the agents of the action, 'Dad and Mom':

(38) Батушки всё не было дома, у матушки не было покойной минуты

--меня *позабыли* совсем.
me:ACC forgot:3PL altogether

'Dad always was not in, Mom had no easy time. I was forgotten altogether.'

It is very hard to distinguish an IDPC from a sentence with an omitted subject in these cases, but the force of the expression here is not "Dad and Mom forgot me" but "no one remembered me", therefore it is not appropriate to assume a specified person as the agent. The IDPC in Russian, furthermore, can express even an action of the speaker (Waguri 1961:151):

(39) Не хочу я, *говорят* тебе! [=я *говорю* тебе]
not want I say:3PL you:DAT

'I don't care for it, I'm saying to you.'

In an IDPC the agent of the action cannot be expressed in the instrumental case, but is suggested by a subject-dimension determinant (субъектно-пространственный детерминант) (АН СССР 1980:II.356):

(40) О, меня не любили никогда даже в школе. Меня всегда
oh me:ACC not loved:3PL never even in school always

и *везде* не любили.
and everywhere

'Oh, I was never loved even in school. I was never loved anywhere.'

- (41) *Из Петербурга настаивают на скорейшем отъезде*
from Peterburg insist:3PL on most-prompt departure

посла.
ambassador:GEN

'It is insisted from Peterburg that the ambassador should depart as soon as possible.'

Indefiniteness of the agent can be also expressed by other means than the IDPC, for example, by personal constructions with the subject such as *некоторые* "some people" or *кто-то* "somebody" in Russian:

- (42) а. Стучат в дверь.
knock:3PL to door

'There is a knock on the door.'

- б. *Кто-то* стучит в дверь.
somebody knocks to door

'Somebody knocks on the door.'

(42a) and (42b) have almost the same meaning, but the latter insists that the agent is unknown or unspecified while the former does not. Sato (1974:31), dealing only with Russian, has discussed that IDPCs "contains no information but that the agent is human".

The speaker and the hearer are excluded from the possible agents of the IDPC in Czech, Slovak and Polish, therefore the IDPC in these languages is [-inclusive] in the first and second person. The Russian counterpart, however, is equivalent to personal passive, hence the feature [\pm inclusive] (Grep1 1987:347). See the examples (39) above and (43):

- Russian
(43) *Фрукты едят сырыми.*
fruits:ACC eat:3PL rawly

'We eat raw fruits.'

5.2 Generalized-personal construction

Besides the impersonal passive and the IDPC there is another kind of subjectless constructions in Slavic, namely the generalized-personal construction (обобщенно-личное предложение in Russian; hence-

forth GPC) in which the predicate is usually in the second person singular. The use of the construction is comparable with that of English *you*. The effect of the construction is more colloquial than that of the IDPC:

Bulgarian

(44) Не е лесно да бъдеш баща.
not is easy COMP will-be:2SG father

'It is not easy to be a father.'

Russian

(45) Скажешь -- не вернешь.
say:2SG not reverse:2SG

'One cannot withdraw what has been said.'

The following examples from Polish involve the human agentive subjects *pan* "you" and *człowiek* "man" respectively, but their meaning is that of GPC (Kimura and Yoshikami 1973:212, 280-81):

(46) Zeszty dostanie pan w sklepie papierniczym po drugiej
notebooks get:3SG "you" in store stationery on other
stronie ulicy.
side street

'You can get notebooks at the stationery store on another side of the street.'

(47) Ale dopiero wówczas, gdy zobaczy się bezmiar zniszczeń i
dzieło odbudowy na własne oczy, człowiek zdaje sobie
man realizes
sprawę, jak wiele uczyniliście...
matter how much did:PAST.2PL

'However, not until one see the vastness of the destruction and the work of reconstruction with his own eyes does one can realize how much work you have done...'

These constructions (and the constructions which are to be interpreted as a GPC) show the feature of the agent [+human] and lack some properties of the most prototypical passives, except for the pragmatic function of indicating no agents. Thus it would be appropriate to describe them as "less prototypical active constructions" rather than "less prototypical passive constructions".⁵

5.3 Some constraints on passives

A closer look at each passive construction in Slavic reveals some differences among them.

The agent of the impersonal passive with an RF is not always unspecified in Polish. In (48), for instance, the agent is unspecified, in (49) the agent is a specified small group and in (50) the agent is the speaker himself (Kimura and Yoshikami 1973:234):

(48) Tu *się* tylko *wsiada*, a *wysiada się* na drugim końcu.
 here RF only gets-on and gets-off:RF on other end
 'You can only get on here; the exit is at another door.'

(49) W jakim języku *mówi się* u pana w domu?
 in what language speaks:RF at you in house
 'What language is spoken in your home?'

(50) Co ja mogę mieć do powiedzenia? *Cierpi się*...
 what I can have to something-to-say bear:RF
 'What can I have to say? I'm under suffering...'

The impersonal passive with PF, on the other hand, cannot be used when the agent is many and unspecified persons as in (51). Furthermore, the speaker is excluded from the agents in (52) (p.236):

(51) Przedtem domy *budowało się*/**budowano* z drzewa.
 once house:ACC built:RF/PF of wood
 'Once they used to built houses of wood.'

(52) Nikt nie siadał do stołu. *Czekano* na ojca.
 nobody not sat to table waited:PF on father
 'Nobody sat at table. They waited for father.'

6.0 Conclusion

In this paper we have investigated the IDPC as a passive, and proposed a new framework of passives in Slavic in course of the discussion. Now we can integrate the GPC into the system of the passive, so that we have the hierarchy given below:

The prototypical hierarchy of the passives in Slavic

	more prototypical	
no traces of the agent	personal passive	a new subject = the patient
.....		
the trace of the agent:	impersonal passive	no new subject
[+human]	IDPC	
	GPC	the subject = the agent
	less prototypical	

As it is one of the properties of a subject to carry the topic (Timberlake 1976:560), the statement that the patient becomes the new subject in the personal passive means virtually that the patient becomes a primary candidate for the topic if not necessarily the only one. It may be that the common character of the impersonal passive and the IDPC is that there are no candidates for the topic.

Something must be referred to here on the morphology of the IDPC. There are no clues by which we can tell IDPCs from the clauses with an omitted subject. Grepl (1987:348) states that "[i]n Russian the forms of the 3rd Pers. Pl. in the deagentive function are also specified *morphologically*, by the absence of the personal pronoun, which is otherwise a more or less obligatory component of the verbal paradigm of today" (with Grepl's emphasis), but we still have difficulties in distinguishing the two constructions in some Slavic languages such as Polish and Czech where the subject pronoun is often omitted unless emphasized.

Most of the examples cited above are extracted from their context and, therefore, more or less treated as if they were independent from it. A further analysis of a construction in the discourse will lead us to a fuller understanding of the pragmatic function or the stylistic force the passive in Slavic bears.

Notes

1. Contrary to Standard Russian, constructions with a PF are freely formed even from imperfective verbs. See Timberlake (1976:552).
2. *Любится*, the RF of *любить*, has reciprocal meaning when it is used with a plural subject, and potential when used as an impersonal verb:
 - 1) Они *любятся*.
they love:RF.3PL
'They love each other.'
 - 2) Люби, *покуда любится*, терпи, *покуда терпится*.
love:IMPER while love:RF bear:IMPER while bear:RF
'Love while you can love, bear while you can bear.'
3. Huszcza (1985:56) also states, in passing, that the IDPCs "have the function of the impersonal construction though they 'are in the third person plural in form".
4. It is indicated in the paper cited that the parts before "|" are "Topic" and the parts after it "Comment".
5. See the hierarchy shown in section 6 below.

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現代スラヴ諸語の受動構文と不定人称構文 [要旨]

川辺 博

本稿は、従来は機能的側面においてのみ"規範的"受動構文との類似性が論じられてきたスラヴ諸語の不定人称構文を、動作主が主語として現れないという点から形態的にも広義の非人称受動構文としてとらえようとするものである。ここでは受動のプロトタイプの定義が援用される。動作主の素性が抹消されるか否か、新しい統語的主語が現れるか否かによって、人称受動-非人称受動-不定人称構文-普遍人称構文の順にプロトタイプ性が下がっていくと考える。

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