

TO GET OR TO BE?
USE AND ACQUISITION OF *GET*- VERSUS *BE*-PASSIVES:
EVIDENCE FROM CHILDREN AND ADULTS

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The use and acquisition of the *get*-passive has so far yielded a variety of accounts and suggestions. This paper presents new experimental evidence concerning the use and the acquisition of the *get*-passive by children, as well as adult judgments of *get*- and *be*-passives. Within a prototype approach to the passive, experiments investigated when 2–4-year-old British children produce *get*- as opposed to *be*-passives. The role of direct affectedness of the patient on *get*-passive production was investigated further in a follow-up experiment. In addition to the child data, ratings of *get*- and *be*-passives were obtained from British English adult speakers to investigate the acceptability of these passives and their relationship to developmental data. The first experiment showed that the chosen prototype approach clearly predicts children's acquisition of *be*-passives with *get*-passives being more peripheral members of the category 'passive' than *be*-passives. The second study shows that even if the child herself is the affected patient in the play action, *get*-passives are only rarely produced. In contrast to American children, direct affectedness did not induce British children to produce a significant amount of *get*-passives. Last, adult ratings confirm that British English speakers rate *be*-passives consistently as better examples of passive sentences than *get*-passives. The evidence suggests that *get*-passives are more peripheral for British than for American children and adults. Implications for the possible role of parental input and the validity of existing accounts of the *get*-passive are discussed.

1. *Get- vs. be-passives: An overview*¹

Why do speakers of English in some situations prefer the *get*-passive over the *be*-passive? What are the developmental differences in the acquisition of *get*- and *be*-passives? Great uncertainty prevails as satisfactory explanations for the use of the *get*-passive have neither been found by investigating adult passives, nor have they been detected through the study of child language. In this paper, I will present new experimental evidence on the use and the acquisition of the

get-passive. Within a prototype approach to the passive, production experiments were carried out investigating children's use of the *get*- as opposed to the *be*-passive. In addition, typicality judgments of *get*- and *be*-passives were obtained from adults. In order to clarify the positions held on the *get*-passive, I will start by giving a brief overview of the positions held on the *get*-passive per se (largely in the adult speaker) and then move on to describe how researchers find more evidence by watching the *get*-passive's coming into existence in children's language.

1.1 *The get- over the be-passive in adult speakers*

A first set of factors trying to explain language users' choice of the *get*-passive over the *be*-passive is of a semantic and pragmatic nature.

- a. *Dynamism*. It has been suggested that the *get*-passive has more 'active' or more causative qualities than the *be*-passive (Svartvik 1966; Lakoff 1971; Gee 1974; Romaine 1984) and receives a more dynamic interpretation (Keenan 1975; Quirk et al. 1985). Diachronic studies (Langacker & Munro 1975; Shibatani 1985; Givón & Yang 1994) support this view as they suggest that the *get*-passive has grown out of the more active transitive meaning of *to get*, i.e. 'to take/grab something', and has only established itself since the middle of the eighteenth century after detransitivization processes.
- b. *Responsibility*. Events described by the *get*-passive have been described by some linguists as rather random, unexpected, or even rare (e.g. Standwell 1981); others (e.g. Schibsbye 1970; Lakoff 1971), however, have suggested that the *get*-passive emphasizes that the patient draws the action intentionally towards himself, thereby gaining a degree of control and responsibility over the action while at the same time being affected by it (as in *The politician got arrested to prove his point/got arrested on purpose*) (Dirven & Radden 1977; Givón & Yang 1994).
- c. *Speaker viewpoint and adversity*. It has also been claimed that the *get*-passive can be used to express attitudes, personal viewpoints, and emotional states, as in *I got promoted* (vs. *I was promoted*) (Lakoff 1971; Dirven & Radden 1977; Chappell 1980). It is seen to especially reflect negative attitudes of the speaker, as in *Charlene got fired* (Banks 1986; Budwig 1990 in a study on children's use of the passive). Herold (1986, cited in Givón 1994) has found that 85% of *get*-passives have adversative character and negative conno

tations; similarly, Collins (1996) has observed that 67.4% of *get*-passives² imply adversative behavior (while only 23.4% gave rise to beneficial conversational implicatures and 9.3% were neutral). Some of the *get*-passives studied diachronically by Givón and Yang (1994) also describe a state that is evoked by an adversary agent and is usually not desired by the affected patient, as in *get hurt*, *get killed*, *get run over*.

- d. *Agent and patient roles*. The adversative character of the *get*-passive brings about a stronger focus on the patient than the *be*-passive, which may explain why *get*-passives are used more often without an agent than *be*-passives (Svartvik 1966; Quirk et al. 1985; Johansson & Oksefjell 1996). Givón and Yang (1994) have also found a difference in the type of entities in the patient role: primarily, *get*-passives occur with animate, human patients, while *be*-passives occur with human as well non-human patients. The ideal agent is seen as being either obvious or at least easy to recover, with human agents being better examples of agents than animal or non-human agents (Collins 1996).

In an attempt to integrate most of the above factors, Collins (1996) suggests a description in terms of a fuzzy set approach, with the array of *get*-passives ranging from central instances (dynamic, with traceable agents, and the ability to alternate with active sentences) to more peripheral adjectival and formulaic instances.³ However, although Collins divides *get*-passives into five groups with varying centrality, it is not possible to predict clearly which *get*-passive belongs to which subgroup because he does not clarify the weight of the *get*-passive components. As he has not carried out typicality ratings with native speakers, his centrality groups so far stand without any empirical foundation.

In addition to semantic and pragmatic factors influencing the *get*-passive, a number of stylistic, social, and regional factors also seem to play a role in the use of the *get*-passive.

- a. *Stylistic variety*. In more formal contexts (Collins 1996) and in written English, the *get*-passive tends to be avoided whereas it is observed more frequently in informal and in spoken English (Svartvik 1966; Standwell 1981; Quirk et al. 1985; Collins 1996; Johansson & Oksefjell 1996). Collins (1996) shows that central *get*-passives occur with an average frequency of 96 per million words in corpora of spoken English (Australian and British English),⁴ whereas they

only occur with 43 per million words in written corpora. Nevertheless, in spoken British English, *be*-passives are used with a proportion of 30:1 times more often than *get*-passives (Johansson & Oksefjell 1996).

- b. *Social variety*. Making use of data in Herold (1986), Givón and Yang (1994) investigated the distribution of *get*- and *be*-passives on social class background. Their results show that speakers belonging to the American working class use *get*- and *be*-passives almost equally frequently (49% and 51%, respectively). In contrast, American upper class speakers used the *get*-passive only 17% of the time whereas their use of the *be*-passive exceeded the *get*-passives clearly with an 83% preference.
- c. *Regional variety*. In different varieties of English, e.g. British and American English, the *get*-passive appears roughly equally often in written British and American English, while it has been claimed to occur more frequently in spoken American than in spoken British English (Dirven & Radden 1977). In contrast to this, it has been stated that overall, the *be*-passive occurs more frequently in both spoken American and British English. Thus, American speakers use the *get*-passive more than British speakers, but both use the *be*-passive most of the time (Svartvik 1966; Sussex 1982). However, there are to date no large corpora on spoken American English available to sustain these claims with the same amount of empirical data as provided by Collins (1996) and Johansson and Oksefjell (1996) for written and spoken British English.⁵

In explaining the choice of the *get*-passive over the *be*-passive in adult speakers, I have drawn attention to (i) semantic and pragmatic factors, in particular the degree to which the *get*- or *be*-passive displays ‘active’ or causative qualities (cf. *dynamism*) and the role and focus of the patient and the agent in the event described by the *get*-/*be*-passive (cf. *responsibility*, *(speaker) viewpoint*, and *adversity*), and (ii) stylistic, social, and regional factors. In order to get a better grasp of how this complex interplay of factors works, it is useful to investigate its *development* as we can observe how the different components of the *get*- and *be*-passive start to work and interact. Looking at child language as well as at the target language helps us to get a more complete picture of the underlying principles and mechanisms at work.

1.2 *Development of the get-passive*

Much as the various aspects of the use and frequency of *get*-passives have been discussed for adult speakers of English, the use and frequency of *get*- as opposed to *be*-passives in children is still an open question, especially as conflicting evidence concerning the acquisition of *get*-passives needs to be resolved. Attention to auxiliary choice in the acquisition of the passive voice has been rather meager and systematic empirical investigation of *get*- versus *be*-passives in young children is still sparse. To find a connection between assumptions and theories on the *get*-passive in the target language and in child language, experiments with children will be reviewed here in more detail.

In the child language literature, it has been assumed that the *get*-passive is a form of early 'children's passive' (Turner & Rommetveit 1967) from which the *be*-passive might evolve (see also Marchman et al. 1991, for age differences in the production of *be*- and *get*-passives). In a similar vein, Harris and Flora (1982) hold that *get*-passives rather than *be*-passives are a forerunner in imitation, comprehension, and production. Fraser, Bellugi and Brown (1963) hold the view that children use the *get*-passive in order to differentiate passive sentences more strongly from active sentences.

Budwig's (1990) analyses spontaneous language data of two American children (Melissa Bowerman's two daughters; a longitudinal study from ages 3 to 10) and she also carries out an imitation and sentence repair experiment with children and adults in order to find functional differences in children's and adults' use of the *get*- versus the *be*-passive. She shows that these two children produce fewer *get*-passives than *be*-passives at all ages, with less *get*-passives being produced as they get older.⁶ This stands in sharp contrast to the assumptions of Turner and Rommetveit (1967), Fraser, Bellugi and Brown (1963), and Marchman et al. (1991), and is also in conflict with reports on spoken American English (Svartvik 1966; Dirven & Radden 1977). Furthermore, Budwig (1990) finds that *get*-passives occur more often in combination with a *by*-phrase than *be*-passives, which, once more, conflicts with expectations derived from studies on adult language (cf. Svartvik 1966; Quirk et al. 1985; Givón & Yang 1994). Then again, Budwig's (1990) results are consonant with adult language studies in the following two respects. First, for agentless passives, Budwig observes that *get*-passives are often used in combination with animate patients while agentless *be*-passives combine mostly with inanimate patients. This finding is in accordance with Givón and Yang (1994). Second, as far as adversity is concerned, Budwig (1990) finds that *get*-passives are more often combined with an adversary action and a negatively affected patient than *be*-passives. This could be seen as evidence in favor of the theoretical position above that *get*-passives express the adversary action stronger than *be*-passives

and thus focus on the affected patient (cf. Lakoff 1971; Dirven & Radden 1977; Quirk et al. 1985; Herold 1986; Givón & Yang 1994).

In her imitation and sentence repair task with American children and adults, Budwig (1990) finds further evidence for her claim that children use the *get*-passive more frequently to focus on the non-agentive perspective in contexts expressing an action that negatively affects the patient. Adults, however, when presented with *be*-passives, show a preference for *be*-passives over *get*-passives as they retain 70% of *be*-passives while changing 30%. When presented with adversative *get*-passives, they retain only 53% of the tested *get*-passives while 48% are changed to *be*-passives or actives.⁷ Budwig concludes that adults and children might still possess the same underlying functional distinctions (favoring *get*-passives if expressing the negative affectedness of the patient), but that adults are influenced by tuition to favor *be*-passives. Further research with adults needs to be carried out as Budwig's studies cannot resolve this matter. Experiment 3 in this paper will take a first step towards addressing the status of *get*-passives in British adults.

A final outcome of Budwig's study is that children produce more *get*-passives than *be*-passives when they themselves are affected by the action. This is noteworthy as it fits in with the view that *get*-passives express the affectedness of the patient more strongly than *be*-passives. However, systematic testing of this assumption has not been carried out. Experiment 2 will focus on testing children using direct affectedness.

Child language experiments by Marchman et al. (1991) show preferences for the production of *get*- vs. *be*-passives which differ from Budwig's (1990) results. Making use of earlier findings that children produce more passives if they encode prototypically transitive verbs like *to kick* (Maratsos et al. 1985), Marchman et al. studied the production of *get*- and *be*-passives in adults and children using prototypically transitive (e.g. *biting*) and non-prototypically transitive (e.g. *giving*) elicitation scenes.⁸ While American adults produced mostly *be*-passives (only 8% *get*-passives), with prototypically transitive elicitation scenes, American children between 3 and 11 years of age overwhelmingly preferred *get*- over *be*-passives, with 5–6-year-olds producing 100% *get*-passives. Overall, prototypically transitive scenes were more often encoded with *get*-passives than with *be*-passives (e.g. simple scenes: *horse bites goat*; complex scenes: *snake bites a horse and then a sheep*). *Be*-passives were produced to a greater extent with non-prototypical dative and locative actions (e.g. *man gives flower to the lady*; *baby crawls under a table*) than with prototypical transitive scenes. However, younger children (3–4 years) showed a different pattern of reaction as they commented upon all non-prototypical

scenes with *get*-passives only (if they used passives at all) and used the *be*-passive in 15% of the cases to describe prototypical transitive scenes (with the remaining 85% of produced passives being *get*-passives). Marchman et al. conclude that *be*-passives reflect a functional relation to ongoing states while *get*-passives seem to be used more frequently to express change of state resulting from prototypically transitive actions. Although this interpretation is supported by the results of the 5–6-year-olds, Marchman et al. emphasize that further investigation is necessary to account for the deviating pattern of results of the 3–4-year-olds. Furthermore, they have left the question unanswered of what makes an action prototypical and they have not systematically investigated the interplay of the role of patient, agent, action and the degree of prototypicality of the whole action scene.

Meints (1996, 1999a) attempts to overcome these problems by systematic variation of the different factors involved in comprehension and production of the *get*- and *be*-passive.⁹ Within a prototype approach, Meints systematically varies patient and agent animacy together with a scale of five differing degrees of prototypical transitivity of the action (based on a previous investigation of the conceptual structure of verbs). Thus, the above-mentioned factors (e.g. dynamism, agent and patient, affectedness) are subsumed under this prototype approach. Moreover, factors like semantic reversibility, focus, and event-probability are taken into account as well. Therefore, the effects of the single factors can be scrutinized as well as possible interactions.

For this paper, especially the production results (reported in Meints 1996, 1999a) are of interest as children were free to produce *get*- or *be*-passives. The results indicate that the prototypicality degree of the passive construction can successfully predict the acquisition order of the passive (for more detailed explanations see Experiment 1). Typical passives (e.g. *The postman was bitten by the dog*) are indeed acquired earlier than less typical passives (e.g. *The boy was seen by the girl*). In view of these results, the aim of Experiments 1, 2, and 3 (cf. *infra*) is to find empirical evidence for some of the proposed theoretical explanations for the production of *get*- as opposed to *be*-passives and to investigate whether a prototype approach (building mainly on semantic-pragmatic factors) can contribute to solving some of the still open questions concerning the use and acquisition of the *get*- as opposed to the *be*-passive. In addition, the category status of *get*-passives for British adults is investigated and then compared with Budwig's and Marchman et al.'s data on American adults. Differences between American and British participants—children and adults—are especially of interest as the *get*- and *be*-passive differences might stem

more strongly from differences in category status and/or regional variation than from underlying semantic and pragmatic factors.

First, experiments on the production of *get-* and *be-*passives was carried out with 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds to investigate the influence of different prototypicality levels on the production of *get-* and *be-*passives (Experiment 1 reported in Meints 1996, 1999a). 2-year-olds were included to capture the earliest possible time of production of either *get-* or *be-*passives; 3- and 4-year-olds were selected to replicate the findings of Marchman et al. (1991) with British children. In addition to the results of Meints (1996, 1999a), a separate data analysis with respect to *get-*passives was carried out in Experiment 1. Will British children show a production of about 15% *be-*passives to encode prototypical transitive events with the remaining produced passives being *get-*passives, as the American children did? If the *get-*passive is generally produced more often than the *be-*passive whenever a prototypical transitive scene is encoded, as the data by Marchman et al. (1991) suggest, then we should be able to find this effect with British children, too. If, on the other hand, the choice of *get-* or *be-*passives is independent of the underlying prototypically transitive scene, then the question of *to get* or *to be* must be due to other effects (e.g. status of *get-*passive category membership, regional variation, frequency of input) and there should be no increase in the production of *get-*passives for prototypical passive constructions (i.e. those passives with an underlying prototypical transitive scene like *he got bitten*).

2. Experiment 1: Children's production of *get-* and *be-*passives

2.1 Introduction

Experiment 1 looks at the following questions: (i) When do British children use the passive voice? (ii) Which type of passive (*be-* or *get-*passive) do they acquire first? (iii) Which factors determine the acquisition of passives?

In order to address these questions, the English passive was investigated as a category displaying typicality effects, with the canonical action event as its prototype (e.g. *The postman was bitten by the dog*) and other kinds of passives as more peripheral members (e.g. *The postman was seen by the cat*). In particular, the aim of this experiment was twofold: (i) to examine the effect of different prototypicality levels on the production of *get-* and *be-*passives; (ii) to investigate whether British children show a production of about 15% *be-*passives to encode prototypical transitive events, with the remaining produced passives being *get-*passives, as the American children did. As a preliminary, it needed to be established what constitutes a prototypical passive. The various

factors contributing to a prototypical passive were studied by Meints (1996, 1999a, 1999b), who investigated the prototypicality of agent, patient, and action, along with the role of focus, semantic reversibility, and likelihood of the action scene. (In order to determine the underlying conceptual structure of the different actions/verbs, a study had been carried out with British adults and adolescents). The results of these investigations and of further research into the character of patient, agent, action and transitivity, focus, reversibility and event-probability led to the following predictions about a passive prototype (Meints 1996, 1999a, 1999b). Prototypical passives should comprise a patient-focused, prototypical transitive scene as described below:

Prototypical transitive scene		
<i>The postman</i> patient	<i>was bitten</i> action	<i>by the dog</i> agent
is	–incorporates high degree of	is
–highly affected	–actionality	–acting
–animate or inanimate	–punctuality	–animate
–focused	–direct physical contact	–defocused
	–a visible result	

Table 1: *Prototypical transitive scene*
with factors contributing to the prototypicality of passives

In prototypical passives, the patient should be the focus of attention and the sentence should be semantically irreversible.¹¹ The sentences *the postman was bitten by the dog* and *the cheese was eaten up by the mouse* are examples for prototypical passives as defined in this study. Examples of atypical passives are *The postman was seen by the dog* and *the cheese was smelled by the mouse*. In these cases, (i) the patient is not affected; (ii) as far as the action is concerned, the degrees of actionality and punctuality are much lower, no physical contact is involved, and there is no visible result; (iii) the agent is not a highly active one.¹² In other words, the degree of prototypicality of a passive sentence is predicted to increase (i) as the affectedness of the patient (which is focused and animate or inanimate) is higher, (ii) as the scores on the action group factors (intentionality, result, duration, degree of activity of the action, and direct physical contact during the action, cf. Meints 1996) are higher, (iii) and as the affecting force of the agent increases.

The passive should be acquired in the following order:

Prototypicality	Patient (focused)	Action	Agent
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Hierarchy		(defocused)	
<i>high</i>	highly affected	action group 1 (high typicality of action)	highly affecting
<i>high to medium</i>	medium affected	action group 2 (medium typicality of action)	medium affecting
<i>medium to low</i>	medium affected	action group 3 (adj.) (medium-low typicality of action)	medium affecting
<i>low</i>	least affected	action group 4 (low typicality of action)	least affecting

Table 2: *Prototypicality Hierarchy for passive acquisition*

All in all, the passive is treated as a graded category with fuzzy boundaries and prototypical passives at its center. Prototypical passives comprise a patient-focused, prototypical transitive scene. As prototypical members of a category are acquired earlier than non-prototypical members (Rosch 1973, 1978; Anglin 1976), a gradual acquisition of the passive was predicted with children acquiring prototypical examples of the passive earlier than more peripheral ones.

2.2 Method

Participants. Participants were thirty-five English children of three age groups (2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds). All children were monolingual speakers of English from a middle class social background. The experiments were carried out in three different nurseries in Fulham, London, UK. The nurseries offered separate rooms so that the study could be carried out without any disturbances. The sessions took between ten and twenty minutes and were documented by video- and DAT-recordings.

Materials. 110 stimuli scenes were constructed in which the factors prototypicality of agent, patient, and action, and semantic reversibility were varied systematically from high to low prototypicality. Toys were used to enact the scenes for the children (animals/humans, vehicles, everyday objects). All children were able to name the toys.

Procedure. All children in the production study had to comment on the 110 scenes that were acted out by the experimenter while the children were watching. The study was split up into different sessions to avoid tiring or boring the children. In order to elicit either *get-* or *be-*passives, it was necessary to use a patient-focused question (e.g. *What happened to the X?*) in these production experiments, as children would not normally respond with a

passive sentence but use the active voice instead. Table 3 shows the type of passive constructions the children could produce (e.g. a full, reversible, verbal *be*- or *get*-passive like *The postman was/got hit by the burglar*):

Possible passive constructions
Full passives/ passives without <i>by</i> -phrase
Reversible/irreversible passives
Verbal/adjectival passives
<i>Get/be</i> -passives

Table 3: Overview of passive constructions investigated in production experiments (Meints 1996)¹³

The dependent variable was the child's response (utterance of a passive—with *be* or *get*, an active sentence, or other utterances). To avoid training effects, filler items were used, with a 2:3 ratio between passives and filler items. The above mentioned toys were used as agent as well as patient items. It is important to note that, in order to avoid confounding prototypicality and frequency effects, frequency of occurrence of objects (to be expressed by nouns) and actions (to be expressed by verbs) in the passive sentences was controlled by using only those items that were highly frequent in child language (data obtained from MacArthur CDI (Fenson et al. 1994) and Bristol Child Language Corpus (Wells 1971–1985)).

2.3 Results and discussion

Three 3-factorial MANOVAs were calculated (Age group x Action group x Agent; Age group x Action group x Patient; Age group x Action group x Reversibility).¹⁴ Analysis of variance showed that the predicted prototypical passives were produced earlier and in larger numbers than more peripheral passives (age group main effect: [$F(2,24) = 5.41; p < 0.05$]; action group main effect: [$F(2,48) = 7.93; p < 0.011$]).¹⁵ As expected, children do not produce all sorts of possible passives equally. 2-year-olds produce a few passives of medium typicality and slightly more highly prototypical passive sentences (while they are able to produce active sentences). They do not produce atypical passives at all. 3-year-olds produce more passives overall than 2-year-olds and their correct responses increase in accordance with the predicted passive hierarchy. 4-year-olds produce the highest number of passive sentences, including the more peripheral ones. Figure 1 illustrates the action group effect for the three age groups (for all produced passives together):

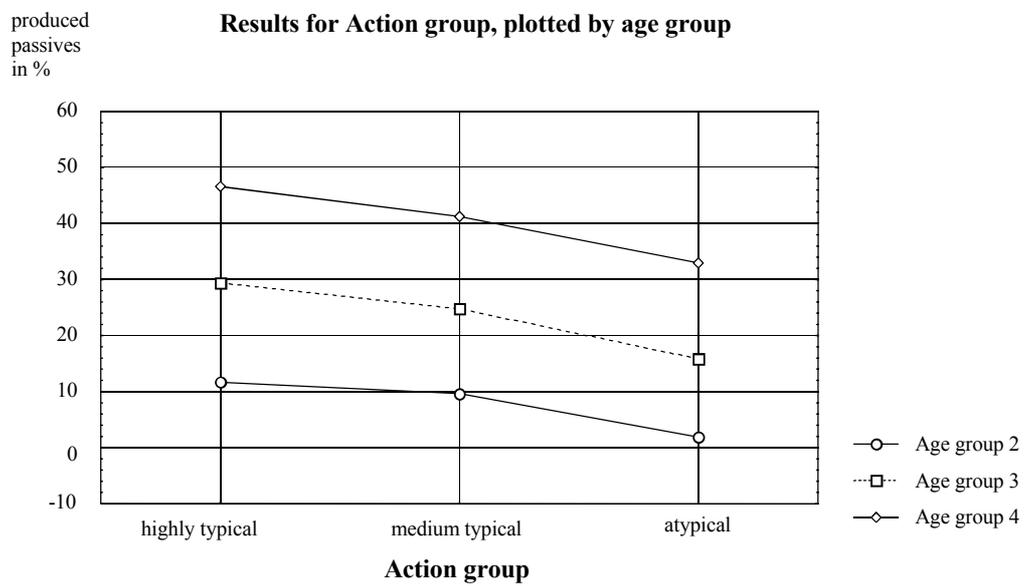


Figure 1: *Correctly produced passives in % for action group, divided into age groups*

The prototype approach successfully predicts the course of acquisition of the passive, and thus confirms the existence of a hierarchy in the acquisition of the passive. At the same time, this approach provides a coherent image of how children acquire the English passive, in that it has successfully integrated, and systematically tested, a variety of factors influencing passive acquisition into a category 'passive'.

However, if we take a closer look at the experimental results, we find that children's production of passives mainly consists of *be*-passives. While of all elicited utterances (100%), 60.6% were passives, out of these 60.6%, only 183 (4.8%) were *get*-passives. The vast majority of the children in this study (91.4%) preferred *be*-passives over *get*-passives, if they produced passives at all. Only three (8.6%) of the children produced the *get*-passive as their predominant passive form. Additionally, out of the 91.4%, one child used a *get*-passive once, three children twice, one child four times and one child produced 10 out of possible 110 *get*-passives.

Focusing on the *get*-passive only, we find that only the above mentioned three children produce *get*-passives more often in reply to the elicitation scenes than *be*-passives. These three 4-year-old children produced 46%, 45%, and 57% *get*-passives (which is comparable with the rate of *be*-passives produced by other children) and only 3.8%, 7.7%, and 2.9% *be*-passives. Their strategy seems to be to use *to get* instead of a form of *to be* whenever the patient is talked about. This way, *he got melled* (= smelled) is produced alongside with *got seened*, *got forgotten* (atypical passives), *got followed*, *got drawed* (medium typicality passives), *got trodden on*, *got fallten over*, and even *got dead* (their places in the hierarchy would be higher as the actionality involved is higher), and more prototypical passives like *got chased*, *got pushed*, *got hitten*, *got eatened* (only verb forms listed). A further six children produced between 1 and 10 (0.9% – 9%) *get*-passives out of the maximum of 110 possible passive sentences. One of them produced only one *get*-passive (*he [the ring] got kissed*, age group 3) and three of them produced only two *get*-passives each (*got eaten all*, *got called*, age group 3; *he got left behind*, *he got eatened and the little spider got stolen (...)*, *the cup got hurt*, age group 4); the rest of their utterances consists mostly of *be*-passives and some active voice utterances. One other 4-year-old child produced three *get*-passives (*got eaten up*, *got left behind*, *she got pushed by the car*), again with the rest of the utterances being mainly *be*-passives and a few patient-focused actives of the type *The postman was sad*. The sixth 4-year-old produced ten *get*-passives altogether: *got hitten*, *got kissten*, *got drawed*, *got chased*, *got pushed*, *got eaten*, *got fallten over*, *got caught*, *got hurt*, and *got dead* alongside with *been pushed*,

been eat up, been killed, etc. Again, there seems to be no evident criterion for when the *get-* or the *be-*passive is selected.

The results of Experiment 1 do not replicate the results obtained for American children (cf. Budwig 1990; Marchman et al. 1991). The claim that *get*-passives occur more frequently with animate patients (cf. Budwig 1990; Givón & Yang 1994) could not be shown with British children. Nor do the results show that the *get*-passives that did occur have a *by*-phrase more often than *be*-passives do (cf. Budwig 1990). British children do not show preferences for *get*-combinations with particular types of verbs or patients or agents either. In the few cases where *get*-passives were produced, *get* simply replaced *be*. The scarcity of elicited *get*-passives as opposed to the elicited *be*-passives shows a clear tendency towards the use of the *be*-passive among British children: an overall higher production of *get*- than *be*-passives cannot be found. More specifically, the claim that *get*-passives should be used more when expressing dynamic or prototypical transitive actions (Collins 1996; Marchman et al. 1991; Quirk et al. 1985; Romaine 1984; Keenan 1975; Gee 1974; Lakoff 1971; Svartvik 1966) cannot be supported for British children. Higher frequency of *get*-passives with prototypical transitive scenes could not be found in the age groups 2–4; neither was a gradual increase found in *get*-passive production in accordance with the prototypicality hierarchy. Therefore, it can be stated that within the subcategory of *get*-passives, British children do not differentiate *get*-passives according to their degree of prototypicality. However, looking at the overall category of passives (*be*- and *get*-passives) and at the occasional use of *get*-passives, it could be argued that *get*-passives are peripheral members of the category; in other words, that *be*- and *get*-passives are not equally good category members in British English, with *be*-passives more central and *get*-passives at the periphery of the passive category. As such, *get*-passives might be accessible for typicality effects only to a later time in the development when the range of the passive category has been fully developed; in other words, at the beginning of passive acquisition process, the scope of the *get*-passive might not be fully developed yet. Thus, it can be hypothesized that with older children and adults, gradations within *get*-passives should occur as well (see Experiment 3 for adults).

The experimental results support Marchman et al.'s findings that 3–4-year-olds use *be*-passives 15% more often than 4–5- or 5–6-year-olds to encode prototypically transitive events insofar as the British 3–4-year-olds produced even more *be*-passives (between an average of 30% at the age of three and an average of 47% at the age of four) than their American peers.

Another factor that might contribute to the use of the passive—and which has not been empirically tested yet—is patient affectedness (cf. Section 1.1). In order to test the claim that *get*-passives focus more on the patient and are used more if patients themselves are directly (and for the most part negatively) affected by the action (Svartvik 1966; Quirk et al. 1985; Givón & Yang 1994), the following experiment was set up to evoke elicitation of *get*-passives directly involving the children as patients. Using this new method also allowed the investigation of Budwig's more specific claim that children produce more *get*-passives if they are directly involved in the action themselves (Budwig 1990). Note that this approach is consonant with the above prototype approach. The verbs are taken from the group of highly typical action verbs, the patient is the child herself (animate, affected, and focused), and the agent is the experimenter (animate, acting, and defocused at the time of the question). The difference to Experiment 1 lies in the direct personal involvement of the child as the affected patient herself. Thus, this group of passives is a subgroup of the transitive prototype with an even stronger focus on personal and direct affectedness.

3. *Experiment 2: Elicitation of children's get-passives*

3.1 *Introduction*

In this experiment, the children themselves were directly involved in the action and directly affected by the action. The hypothesis was tested that children produce more *get*-passives if they themselves are the patient of the action and if they are directly and physically involved in and affected by the action, as was found by Budwig (1990). This study is at the same time an attempt to explore a new way of eliciting the *get*-passive as the usual elicitation procedure was only successful to elicit *be*- but not *get*-passives in British children. Highly prototypical action scenes were used in order to facilitate production as much as possible. It is possible that Experiment 1 may not have been focusing enough on the patient's affectedness to make the typicality hierarchy in the *get*-passive production visible. If it is the case that *get*-passives are inherently structured in the same way as *be*-passives are, children's *get*-passive production could be enhanced by testing prototypically transitive scenes and at the same time adding direct affectedness (see Budwig 1990). The findings of Marchman et al. (1991) also suggest that it should be tested whether the transitive prototype makes especially the production of *get*-passives easier. It is hypothesized that, if *get*-passives do express more direct affectedness of the patient by the action, then they should be produced in this task.

3.2 *Method*

Participants. Twenty-six children participated in this investigation, six 2-year-olds, ten 3-year-olds, and ten 4-year-olds. Nine children were visited in nurseries in London and seventeen children were seen in nurseries in Oxford.

Materials. The following passive sentences were to be elicited:

- (1) I got lifted up (by you).
- (2) I got scratched (by you).
- (3) I got kissed (by you).
- (4) I got stroked (by you).
- (5) I got bitten (by you).
- (6) I got tickled (by you).
- (7) I got scared (by you).

Note that, except for (7), these sentences mostly encode highly prototypical transitive scenes. All actions/verbs were known to the children and the enacting of the sentences was carried out in random order.

Procedure. All children were in a testing room they were familiar with. They were asked if they would like to play a game with the experimenter. No toys were used; instead, a scene was enacted involving interaction between the experimenter and the child, whereby the experimenter assumed the role of the agent and the child was assigned the role of the patient. If, for example, the passive sentence *I got lifted up by you* was the target utterance, then the experimenter lifted the child up and afterwards seated the child again on the chair the child had been sitting in before the action. Directly after the scene had been enacted, the experimenter asked the child: ‘What happened to you?’, requiring the child to comment on the action. In the case of actions like *to scratch*, *to bite*, etc., the experimenter only pretended to carry out the action and this was explained to the child beforehand. The nursery’s headmistress was present at all times.

3.3 Results and discussion

Even in this personalized experimental set-up, a rise in the production of *get*-passives could not be found. The results of the investigation are as follows:

Age group	<i>Be</i> -passives	<i>Get</i> -passives	Past participles only	Active voice/others
2 years (6)	--	--	--	42 (100%)
3 years (10)	8 (11.4%)	1 (1.4%)	13 (18.6%)	48 (68.6%)
4 years (10)	2 (2.9%)	1 (1.4%)	8 (11.4%)	59 (84.3%)

Table 4: Number of elicited utterances in the *get*-passive investigation with specific emphasis on affectedness (Experiment 2)

Only two *get*-passives were produced by two different children with one of these being an adjectival *get*-passive *I got scared* (age 4) and the other one being a single verbal passive *I got tickled* (age 3). In contrast, ten *be*-passives were produced. These results show that *get*-passives are produced extremely rarely by British children, even under linguistic and contextual conditions strongly favorable to their production. This finding contrasts with the results for the American children studied by Budwig (1990) and Marchman et al. (1991). The differences in results between Experiments 1 and 2 on the one hand and the American studies on the other hand might be explained by the difference in British and American English, as emphasized by Dirven and Radden (1977) and Quirk et al. (1985). As we could not replicate the results of Budwig’s and Marchman et al.’s studies on American English with British children, it seems plausible to argue that a different usage pattern of the *get*-

passive in American and British English (as Svartvik 1966 and Quirk et al. 1985 stated for adults) could account for the more frequent use of *get*-passives in American children and its infrequent use in British children.

To sum up, British children only very infrequently produce *get*-passives. In Experiment 2, which was specifically designed to focus on a highly prototypical transitive scene while at the same time emphasizing the direct involvement and affectedness of the patient by putting the child into the role of the patient of the action, only two children produce one *get*-passive each. It can be concluded that the *get*-passive cannot be found as often in British children's language production as in American children's utterances.¹⁶ Thus, the *get*-passive cannot be seen as a precursor of all children's *be*-passives or as a prototypical children's passive. Instead, these results restrict possible generalizations of Turner and Rommetveit (1967) and Marchman et al. (1991) to American children only. As this raises the question if regional variation, status of the *get*-passive within the category of passives, and parental usage patterns and input to the child play a role in the acquisition of the *get*-passive, the following study set out to investigate possible differences in parents' input to their children resulting from differences in the status of the *get*-passive for British English and American English adults. In view of Budwig's and Marchman et al.'s results with American adults, it is necessary to find out whether for British native speakers the *get*-passive is a peripheral member of the category of passives. Thus, the next step is to investigate whether British adults rate *get*- and *be*-passives differently in terms of 'goodness of membership' in the category of passives.

4. Experiment 3: Adults' ratings of *be*- and *get*-passives

4.1 Introduction

In order to gain more insight into the status of the different *get*- and *be*-passives in British children, and in particular to explain their preference of the *be*-passive, adults' judgments were obtained using ratings of *get*- and *be*-passives. Here, the aim was to investigate the status of *get*- and *be*-passives for British English speakers and to compare the results with data from American English speakers. If *get*-passives are in general judged by British adults as poorer examples of passive sentences, then this more peripheral member status could predict the infrequent use of *get*-passives by adults and subsequently also explain a lower frequency of use by children using British English. Analyzing which *get*- and *be*-passives obtain high and low ratings will also enable us to determine whether there is a difference between prototypical and atypical *get*-

or *be*-passives; in addition, it will enable us to decide whether British adults judge highly prototypical *get*-passives as more acceptable than peripheral *get*- or *be*-passives or whether British English speakers reject the *get*-passive in general, in which case the difference between *get*- and *be*-passive could be viewed as mainly a regional phenomenon. Thus, *be*- and *get*-passives might turn out not to be equally good examples of category members within the category 'passive'. While gradations can occur within *be*- and within *get*-passives, *be*-passives could be more central in British English with *get*-passives at the periphery of the passive category. Research by Dirven and Radden (1977), Svartvik (1966), and Sussex (1982) also suggests a higher occurrence of *get*-passives in American English. Note that Budwig's participants accepted the relatively high number of 53% of *get*-passives in the sentence repair task and rejected 48%, while accepting 70% of *be*-passives and rejecting only 30%. In contrast, Marchman et al.'s production elicitation task revealed that adults produced only 8% of *get*-passives.

4.2 *Method*

Participants. 29 undergraduates and graduates at Oxford provided stimulus ratings; 18 were female, 11 male. They were aged between 18 and 30 years and were all monolingual British nationals.

Materials. Each stimulus sentence was presented to the adult informants on a computer monitor and a rating scale that ranged from 1 (very good example) to 7 (very bad example) was displayed directly under the passive sentence. Informants made their ratings using the number keyboard on the computer. All stimuli were presented against a white background. First, the sentence was presented; after 500 ms, the rating scale appeared. The full display only disappeared after informants had made their judgment. The passive sentence and the scale were centered horizontally, with the sentence in the vertical center of the screen and the rating scale just below.

Procedure. The informants received written instructions to rate prototypicality similar to those used by Rosch (1973). Thus, to clarify the difference between good exemplars of a category and less good exemplars, they were asked to think of a 'true red' as compared to an 'orangish red' or 'purple red', and they were reminded that some dogs (such as Chihuahuas) are less good examples of the category 'dog'. Participants were then asked to judge passive sentences according to the written instructions and to make their decision as quickly as possible. Informants had no difficulty in understanding the instructions. The experimenter started the first trial and all other trials were launched 500 ms after the participants had pressed the number key indicating their

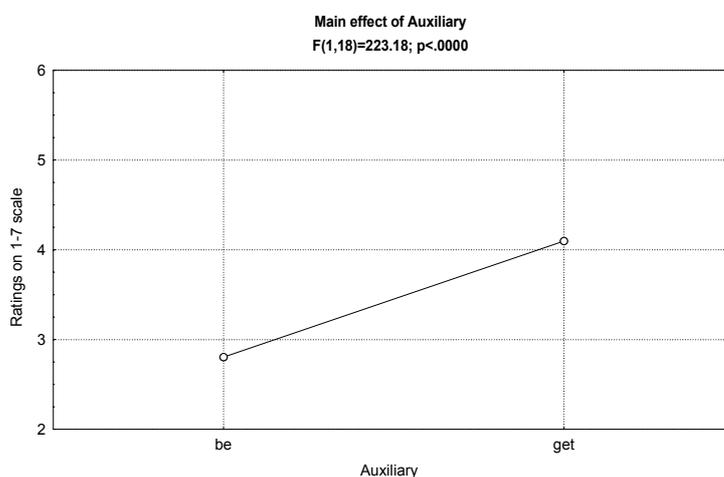
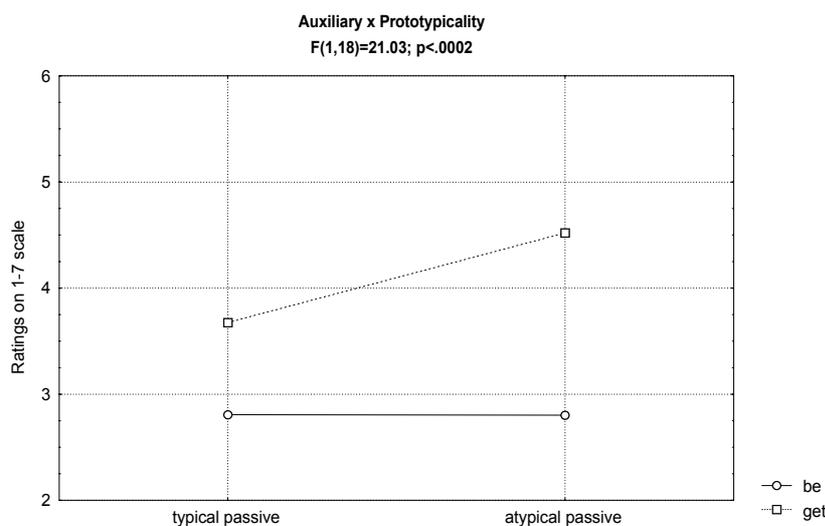
rating. They were presented with a total of 226 sentences, in random order; half of the sentences were *get*-passives and the other half *be*-passives. Adults rated all passives the children had been tested on before (*get*- and *be*-passives), enabling us to compare ‘goodness of membership’ ratings in the category ‘passive’ of *get*- versus *be*-passives.

4.3 Results and discussion

The results of the ratings confirmed that indeed, *get*-passives received higher ratings than *be*-passives. The overall mean rating for *be*-passives was 3.06 ($SD=0.73$) and 4.09 ($SD=0.66$) for the *get*-passives. A dependent *t*-test showed that the differences between *get*- and *be*-passives were highly significant ($p < 0.001$), with *get*-passives being rated as rather poor examples of the passive construction. To test the extent to which the rating difference was stable across all *get*- and *be*-passives, each action group (4 groups: passives designating a highly prototypical, medium and low prototypical transitive scene; plus adjectival passives; see Table 2) was coded in terms of whether the rating difference was in the direction expected (i.e. a lower rating result for the *be*-passive groups as compared to the *get*-passive groups) or reversed. For each of the four verb groups, the rating difference was in the direction expected and differed markedly from chance expectation ($p < 0.001$). A further 2x2 analysis of variance with only highly typical and highly atypical *get*- and *be*-passives reveals a highly significant main effect for the factor ‘Auxiliary’ (*get* versus *be*) with $p < 0.001$ and a highly significant interaction between the factors ‘Auxiliary’ and ‘Typicality’ ($p < 0.001$). Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the effects:

The interaction shows strong differences between typical and atypical *get*-passives (planned comparisons: $p < 0.001$), between typical *get*- and *be*-passives (planned comparisons: $p < 0.001$) and between atypical *get*- and *be*-passives (planned comparisons: $p < 0.001$). There is no significant difference between typical and atypical *be*-passives.

From the data, two important results emerge. First, the main effect for the factor ‘Auxiliary’ shows that British adults judge *be*-passives generally as significantly better examples of passive sentences than *get*-passives. As predicted, sentences like *The postman was bitten by the dog* are rated to be better examples of the category ‘passive’ than *get*-passives like *The postman got bitten by the dog*; or conversely, *get*-passives seem to be generally less good examples of the passive category than *be*-passives. As the *get*-passive’s more peripheral status as a category member suggests a less frequent use of *get*-passives by adults, this could subsequently also explain a lower production frequency by British English children (Experiment 1).

Figure 2: *Highly significant main effect for Auxiliary*Figure 3: *Highly significant interaction between the factors Auxiliary and Typicality*

Second, the interaction between the factors ‘Auxiliary’ and ‘Typicality’ reveals that in the case of *get*-passives, typical passive sentences are rated as significantly better examples of passives than atypical passives. At the same time, *be*-passives are still rated as better examples of passives than the *get*-passives.¹⁷

These results are strikingly parallel with Marchman et al.’s data on the use of *get*- and *be*-passives in adults. In Marchman et al.’s study, American

adults produced around 90% *be*-passives and only 8% *get*-passives. They produced *be*-passives more often than *get*-passives in prototypically transitive as well as in non-prototypical elicitation situations. The results of the British English speakers show a similar pattern as they, too, prefer *be*-passives over *get*-passives. At first sight, this rating study and Marchman et al.'s production study come to the same conclusions: American and British adults both show a clear preference for *be*-passives. In addition, the ratings with British adults show that for *get*-passives, there is a preference for typical over less typical *get*-passives. This corroborates Collins' (1996) view of a radial *get*-passive category for British adults.

However, the data by Budwig (1990) stand in contrast to Marchman et al.'s data and suggests a greater acceptance of *get*-passives in American English speakers than in British English speakers, as does the work by Dirven and Radden (1977), Svartvik (1966), and Sussex (1982). Although Budwig did not rank the judgments, she found that *get*-passives were accepted in 53% of the cases, even if they were semantically inappropriate. The results of Experiment 3 could join Marchman et al.'s and Budwig's findings as these results might indicate that adults do show the influence of the underlying factors, as Budwig (1990) suggests, but that these are overridden in actual language use (and possibly even more so in elicited production task, as tested by Marchman et al.) by external factors such as regional factors and tuition.

As scaled judgments on passive sentences from American adults are currently not available, it would be desirable to obtain comparable ratings with American adults in order to investigate if they show similar rating tendencies. To answer the question of the role of regional influence, it could also be helpful to investigate if the *get*-passive is used more often in spontaneous spoken language. If American adults produced more *get*-passives in spoken language than British speakers, then the performance of American children producing typical *get*-passives could be explained through a combination of category status of the *get*-passive and differences in input frequency.

5. General discussion and conclusion

Among the positions held on the *get*-passive in adult and child language, it was stated that the semantics and pragmatics of the *get*-passive differ from those of the *be*-passive. It has been claimed that the *get*-passive can be used when a patient is in control of the action or when patients/speakers are involved in the action themselves, especially when these actions have direct (often negative) implications for the speaker. When investigating the English passive as a radial category with prototypical passives at its center, it could be stated that *get*-

passives prototypically encode a highly actional, prototypically transitive, dynamic event and focus more on (animate) patients and their attitudes and feelings than *be*-passives. Furthermore, the *get*-passive has been shown to display regional differences (e.g. it is more frequent in American than in British English), stylistic variation (it is more frequent in informal and colloquial style, and less in written than in spoken English), and it is used differently according to differences in social background. As these factors combine in various ways, it is a complex task to explain the usage of *get*- or *be*-passives in adult and in child language.

The aim of the three studies was to detect new empirical evidence for some of the proposed explanations for the production of *get*- as opposed to *be*-passives and thus to clarify the validity of these positions. The following claims were investigated: Do prototypical transitive scenes enhance children's production of *get*-passives and *be*-passives (Experiment 1)? Does the affectedness of the patient enhance children's production of *get*-passives (Experiment 2)? Do adults judge *get*-passives to be as good examples of passive sentences as *be*-passives (Experiment 3)? These questions were asked for British children and adults as the existing evidence only covers the linguistic behavior of American children and adults. Experiment 1 addressed the factors dynamism, responsibility, speaker viewpoint, and adversity as well as agent and patient role as part of the prototypicality hierarchy of the passive construction. Experiment 2 looked at affectedness and thereby addressed especially the factors agent and patient roles, viewpoint and adversity. Experiment 3 investigated the status of *get*- and *be*-passives within the category of passive constructions. All studies address the factor regional variety as comparisons can be drawn to the American studies.

In Experiment 1, it was shown that British children's production of *be*- but not of *get*-passives is enhanced by higher prototypicality of the encoded scene. While the prototypicality predicts the acquisition hierarchy for *be*-passives successfully, the production of *get*-passives does not depend upon the prototypicality of the encoded scene. Nor does it depend on separate factors like animacy of either patient or agent, degree of prototypical action, or the reversibility of the passive. Neither does the affectedness of the patient, even in a specially designed task in which the children themselves are the affected patients, lead to a significant increase in the production of *get*-passives. Instead, British children's infrequent use of *get*-passives reflects their acquired knowledge about *get*-passives as being peripheral members of the 'category passive' in British English. Corroborating evidence comes from the rating tasks in Experiment 3 with British adults, who judged *get*-passives to be more

peripheral passives than *be*-passives. British adults also rated typical *get*-passives as better examples of passives than atypical *get*-passives, but as far as can be interpreted from the existing studies, there is no evidence that these differences are already reflected in 2–4-year-old children's use of the *get*-passive. For children's *get*-passives, the prototype approach meets its limitations in the more fine-grained differences within the less well-known, peripheral *get*-passives. Typicality effects cannot be found, neither are animacy effects or action group effects detectable. Instead, the overall status of the *get*-passive within the category of passives seems to predict children's performance. The majority of children seem to view *be*-passives as the better passive examples and seem to learn to use them first (with typical passives earlier than less typical ones), while *get*-passives are treated as a more peripheral subgroup of passives. This view is not unlikely and is worth testing as it has been shown for lexical acquisition (Meints, Plunkett & Harris 1999) that young children do indeed first restrict the scope of their nouns to typical exemplars of the category and only later on broaden their scope to include less typical exemplars. Thus, it could be worthwhile to conduct the studies with older British children to find out if these have acquired the full scope of passive constructions, including a more detailed view of the *get*-passive. Older children could thus link the results of the 2–4-year-old children (no typicality effects in production) with the results from adults (typicality effects in rating tasks).

To conclude, for British children a prototype approach with the underlying transitive prototype initially only predicts the acquisition hierarchy in the dominant passive, i.e. the *be*-passive. Unlike in American English, the underlying transitive prototype does not yet enhance the production of the *get*-passives in 2–4-year-old British children. Even under most favorable conditions, with the children being the affected patients themselves, the *get*-passive is hardly produced. The evidence suggests that British children learn the passive construction starting with the center of the category first (i.e. prototypical *be*-passives), then acquire more peripheral *be*-passives, and last acquire *get*-passives. Thus, we should be able to observe gradual differences in the treatment of the *get*-passive as the children get older and have more command over the full scope of the passive category. As we do find evidence for more peripheral category membership of *get*-passives in British English adult speakers, older children might show a similar pattern of results while it was not possible to detect these differences in the tested age groups using an elicited production task.

Next to the semantic and pragmatic factors underlying the prototype approach, the parental usage pattern with higher production of *be-* than of *get-* passives also seems to be reflected in the child's acquisition of the passive. As adults do display the predicted typicality effects in the *get-* passive (with all *be-* passives being better examples than *get-* passives), it can further be assumed that the transitive prototype does not only play a role in children's *be-* passives, but also in adults' perception of *get-* passives. Further investigation into the role of the transitive prototype in *get-* passives with older children and in *be-* passives with adults need to be carried out. Ratings with American adults can shed light onto the matter, especially as we might find evidence for a higher frequency of *get-* passives in spontaneous American English as opposed to British English utterances. Furthermore, as parents are subject to regional, social, and stylistic differences, these should be considered in further research. At the moment, input levels for *get-* and *be-* passives of parents using different varieties of English, like American and British English are lacking. Implications for the possible role of parental input in terms of stylistic differences and different social backgrounds should also be taken into account in future research. Ideally, the input to the children should be divided into input towards different age groups as parents tailor their language towards the needs of their children. Future analyses of longitudinal studies and systematic experiments with adults and children will hopefully investigate these issues in an attempt to solve the question of *to get* or *to be*.

Notes

¹ I would like to thank all children and staff in the nurseries in London and Oxford for helping me with conducting the experiments—I am very grateful for their help, interest and friendliness. I would also like to thank Emile van der Zee and Thomas Berg for their very useful and helpful comments. All remaining mistakes are of course my own.

² Collins only considers central *get-* passives as defined in Collins (1996); cf. also *infra*.

³ For the full definition and range of the *get-* passive scale, see Collins (1996:43–49).

⁴ It has to be taken into account that the British English figures might be higher today as the corpora are from 1961, whereas the Australian corpus Collins used is from 1986.

⁵ At the time the research and review of this paper took place, the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken English was not yet widely available.

⁶ Note that Bowerman's data collection of passives is not complete as she wrote down fewer unexceptional passives as the children got older.

⁷ It should be either 52% and 48% or 53% and 47%; I left the numbers as in Budwig (1990).

⁸ For the transitivity scale, see Hopper and Thompson (1980).

⁹ Meints (1996) refers to my unpublished PhD thesis; the results are now published in a shortened version (Meints 1999a).

¹⁰ Note that typicality effects do not reflect the internal structure of the category directly, but are instead the result of cognitive models or theories applied by the human thinker as has been

discussed widely (Medin & Schaffer 1978; Brooks 1978, 1987; Barsalou 1987; Lakoff 1987; Neisser 1987).

¹¹ Consider *the postman was bitten by the dog* and *the dog was bitten by the postman*. According to the world image of the child, a postman would not bite a dog. Although the sentence is syntactically correct and also semantically legal, it is considered to be semantically irreversible due to its unrealistic content.

¹² These results stem from ratings with adults and adolescents on the conceptual structure of verbs (Meints 1996).

¹³ Note that these combine in the following ways:

- (i) complete, semantically irreversible, verbal (*be-* and *get-*)passives
- (ii) complete, semantically reversible, verbal (*be-* and *get-*)passives
- (iii) complete, semantically irreversible, adjectival (*be-* and *get-*)passives
- (iv) complete, semantically reversible, adjectival (*be-* and *get-*)passives
- (v) incomplete, semantically irreversible, verbal (*be-* and *get-*)passives
- (vi) incomplete, semantically reversible, verbal (*be-* and *get-*)passives
- (vii) incomplete, semantically irreversible, adjectival (*be-* and *get-*)passives
- (viii) incomplete, semantically reversible, adjectival (*be-* and *get-*)passives

¹⁴ For details of the design and the analysis see Meints 1996. A full 5-way MANOVA could not be computed as not all the cells of the design could be filled with realistic passives (e.g. the combination Inanimate patient (e.g. *the cup*) x Action group 3 (e.g. *was seen*) x Inanimate agent (e.g. *the ball*) does not have a realistic content and was therefore excluded.

¹⁵ The other analyses yielded similar result patterns.

¹⁶ One might argue that children nevertheless have acquired the *get*-passive, but that the two studies have not been sensitive enough to elicit them. In light of the very high results obtained in Study 1 with *be*-passives and in comparison with Marchman et al. as well as with Budwig's results, this seems highly unlikely. It rather seems to be the case that British children do indeed avoid the production of *get*-passives. To find out more about their knowledge state, comprehension of *get*-passives could be tested.

¹⁷ The fact that there is no significant difference between typical and atypical *be*-passives might be due to the randomized experimentation. In view of seeing the *get*-passive presented, adults might have rated peripheral *be*-passives much more strongly than they would have if presented with *be*-passives only.

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