THE SANSKRIT PASSIVE: SYNCHRONIC BEHAVIOR AND DIACHRONIC DEVELOPMENT

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1: The syntax of the Sanskrit passive has again and again interested and intrigued linguists. As a consequence, there is now a considerable body of literature on the topic. Unfortunately, however, much of that literature tends to be inaccessible or unintelligible to the non-specialist. Moreover, while some facts about the passive are fairly well established, many others still are only poorly investigated. Several factors are responsible for this. One consists in the fact that Sanskrit is not a homogeneous language, chronologically or dialectally. Thus the language of the earliest texts, the Rig-Veda and other metrical 'Saṃhitā' texts (hereafter referred to as Saṃhitā Sanskrit) differs considerably from that of the later Vedic, 'Brāhmaṇa' prose texts (Brāhmaṇa Sanskrit). And this language in turn differs from that of the Classical literature (Classical Sanskrit). Similarly, there can be considerable differences between the Sanskrit described by the indigenous Indian grammarians and that of the actually attested texts. As a consequence the very rich Indian grammatical tradition cannot automatically be assumed to provide reliable information concerning the Sanskrit of actual usage. Only thorough philological study of the attested texts of Sanskrit can yield such information. Except for some very basic facts, however, little work of this sort has been done for the syntax of the Sanskrit passive, especially as far as the earlier stages of the language are concerned.

This paper is intended as a modest contribution in this area, summarizing the results of my study of Sanskrit texts (especially in the Saṃhitā and Brāhmaṇa stages, the so far least well researched periods), combined with what has been observed by others in earlier literature.

The paper purposely is kept as non-technical as possible, so as to make it intelligible to the non-specialist. (As a consequence, references to other literature will be limited to the brief review of literature in section 2 and to the notes.) At the same time, it is hoped that the paper will be

of some use also to those interested in linguistic theory. (I intend to publish a more technical report elsewhere.)

2: The earliest extant treatment of the Sanskrit passive is that in Pāṇini's grammar, dating from at least 400 B.C. and establishing a tradition of indigenous Indian grammar which continues to the present day. Cf. Cardona 1976a (for the grammatical tradition) and 1974, 1976b (for the treatment of the passive in that tradition). Unfortunately, as noted earlier, the Sanskrit described in this tradition may differ considerably from that in actual usage. (Cf. Hock 1981:27-9.) As a consequence, the grammarians' statements are of somewhat reduced usefulness.

Western treatments of the passive begin to appear in the thorough philological tradition of the 19th century. The most important of these and still the best data sources are contained in Delbrück's (1888) syntax of the early, Saṃhitā/Brāhmaṇa language, and in Speijer's (1886) treatment of Classical Sanskrit syntax. Speijer's is perhaps the more useful study, dealing with a variety of quite specialized issues. However, even here many aspects of the passive await more thorough research. Moreover, neither of these studies (or any other study that I know of) has given an account of the important syntactic changes reported in this paper, between the Saṃhitā stage on one hand, and later Sanskrit on the other.

More recent studies are concerned with specific, often highly theoretical and technical aspects of Sanskrit passive syntax. Perhaps the most formidable among these is Gonda 1951, a monograph which continues the earlier philological tradition by providing extensive data to support its claim. That claim, however, is theoretically quite narrow, namely that the majority of so-called Sanskrit passives are not 'real' passives, in that the agent (i.e. the 'logical' subject) does not appear. Moreover, like many other theoretical claims about Sanskrit, this one makes sense only in the particular theory in which it was proposed. (Other theories, for instance, would claim that one of the purposes, perhaps the major purpose, of the passive is to 'demote' or 'deemphasize' agents. Downright deletion may be said to be the most effective means to accomplish this goal.)

The most recent studies have looked to the Sanskrit passive for data concerning general theories of the passive (cf. Johnson 1974, 1977) or as a testing ground for particular grammatical theories (cf. Ostler 1979). Unfortunately, in some cases the Sanskrit data considered are inaccurate (cf.

note 5 below), in others, the data do not go beyond the information available in the Indian grammarians and the standard Western treatments. It might be noted, however, that Ostler's study, concerned mainly with Classical Sanskrit, far exceeds in the breadth of its analysis any other recent publications on the subject.

3: From the morphological point of view, the Sanskrit passive, as a distinct verbal category, is a relatively recent innovation. In the Saṃhitā language it still competes with the older 'middle voice' inflection, which is the original device for morphologically encoding the passive, but which is used also to mark other syntactic categories (such as reflexivization). Moreover, it is an incomplete innovation: Only in the present-tense system is there a consistently distinct morphological passive, characterized by the suffix -ya- plus middle-voice endings. Elsewhere, only the third person singular aorist offers a distinct passive form, characterized by the ending -i and historically a specialization of an older middle-voice form. Everywhere else, middle-voice forms continue to serve as passive forms.

Historically, the passive in -ya- seems related to a non-passive, frequently intransitive or reflexive present formation in -ya-, which may take either 'active' or 'middle' endings. In fact, in the early language it is often not certain whether a given form in -ya- is passive or intransitive/reflexive; cf. (i) below. In many cases, only the presence of an agent phrase (marked by the instrumental case) would make it possible to tell the difference; cf. (ii). In other cases, however, even without such a specified agent a passive interpretation seems to be the only possible one; cf. (iii).[1]

> (i)   *svasuḥ yaḥ jārah ucyate*   (RV 6.55.4)
>   sN   s3
>   'who is called/whose name is lover of (his) sister'
>
> (ii) *nṛbhiḥ suvīraḥ ucyase*   (RV 3.1.21)
>   pI   s2
>   'you are called great hero by the men'
>
> (iii) *idam pitre ... ucyate vacaḥ*   (RV 1.114.6)
>   s3   sN
>   'this message is said to the father'/*'this is called/
>   the name of this is message to the father'

Ideally, the two formations are differentiated by their accent, with the passive accented on the suffix -ya-, the intransitive/reflexive on the root preceding the suffix. However, verbs are unaccented in many syntactic contexts. Moreover, especially for the intransitive/reflexives, we find

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frequent vacillation in accentuation in the early texts. Finally, accentual differences disappear by the Classical period. As a consequence it is perhaps not surprising that the distinction between these two formations remains a fluid one—as long as agents are not specified. In fact, according to the grammarians, the accented -*yá*-formations could be used not only as passives, but also as (in effect) intransitivizing devices, as in (iv) vs. (v) below. (Cf. Pāṇini 3.1.87.) Unlike the passive, however, this intransitivizing formation was not freely applicable to all verbal roots. (Cf. Pāṇini 3.1.88-90; later grammarians add further restrictions.) Moreover, there is syntactic evidence in the later language that the subject of such intransitive verbs is not 'derived' like that of the passives. (Cf. section 5, note 6 below.)

(iv) *puruṣeṇa odanaḥ pacyate*
      sI   sN   s3
      'the rice is cooked by the man'

(v) *odanaḥ pacyate (svayam eva/ātmanā)*
      sN   s3
      'the rice cooks (on its own)'

In addition to these finite passive formations (and their non-finite participles), Sanskrit has two other passive-like formations: a generally past-tense-value participle in -*ta*- and a 'gerundive' or obligational participle in -*ya*- (or other suffixes); cf. (vi) and (vii).

(vi) *yena ... idam svaḥ ... jitam* (RV 8.76.4)
       sI   sN   sN
      'by whom this sky (has been) won'

(vii) *tvam nṛbhiḥ havyaḥ ... asi*   (RV 7.22.7)
        sN   pI   sN   s2
       'you are to be invoked by the men'

4: Syntactically, the passive of the Saṃhitā language behaves very much like the passive of English: It is essentially limited to transitive verbs.[2] The object of the verb is 'promoted' to subject in the passive; cf. examples (i)-(iii) above.[2] And this subject syntactically acts like the subject of an active sentence in respect to word order, reflexivization, and 'absolutive formation'. Thus, of some 30 Rig-Vedic passages which have both the 'derived' passive subject (S) and the agent (A) (i.e. the 'logical' subject which has been 'demoted' to an adverb-like noun phrase, marked by the instrumental) occurring to the left of the verb (V),[3] 22 have the order S A V, with S in initial, subject position, and only 8 have the order A S V. All of the six Rig-Vedic passive sentences with reflexive pronouns have

that pronoun referring to S, not A; cf. e.g. (viii) below. (Note that in active sentences there is a chance of only one in five that reflexivization might refer to non-subjects. It is therefore unlikely that all six of these passives have 'sloppy' reflexivization.) Finally, Sanskrit has a process of 'absolutive formation' by which a dependent clause can be reduced to an adverb-like adjunct of the main clause. (Morphologically this is characterized by the verb changing into an uninflected form in *-tvā* or *-ya*.) In active sentences this process normally takes place only if the subject of the dependent clause is identical with that of the main clause; cf. (ix). While in the Saṃhitā language the construction is only rarely attested with passives, it is noteworthy that in all of the four attested cases, absolutive formation is controlled by the main-clause S, not by A; cf. (x) for an example.[4]

> (viii) *svena yuktāsah kratunā*   (RV 7.90.5)
>   'yoked with their own power'
>
> (ix) *piba niṣadya*   (RV 1.177.4)
>   'drink, having sat down'
>
> (x)   ... *niṣadya* ... *havyaḥ babhūtha* (RV 10.6.7)
>   'having sat down, you are to be invoked'

5: The situation in the later language of the Brāhmaṇas and the Classical texts (as well as of the grammarians) is markedly different. First of all, passives can now be made from all verbs, including from intransitives; cf. (xi). There being no objects which could become the subject of such passives, the resulting structures are ipso facto subjectless or 'impersonal'.[5] (Note that these passives are difficult to translate into English.)

> (xi) *te rājānah bhavanti* (act.)
>   pN   p3
>   'they are kings'
>
>   *taih rājabhiḥ bhūyate* (pass.)
>   pI   s3
>   "by them the action of being kings is performed"

Secondly, in terms of word order, reflexivization, and absolutive formation, it is now the agent (the logical subject), not the derived subject which syntactically behaves like a sentential subject: The unmarked word order now is A S V (vs. earlier S A V); cf. (xi) above. Further, A, not S, now normally controls reflexivization, even if A is deleted; cf. (xii). Finally, A, not S, now controls absolutive formation; and again, it does so even when deleted; cf. (xiii).[6]

(xii)   *ātmanaḥ pūrvā tanūḥ ādeyā*   (TS 6.3.2.6)
         reflex.
         '(one's) own previous body is to be recovered (by one)'

(xiii)   *na vai ahiṅkṛtya sāma gīyate*   (ŚB 1.4.1.1)
             absolut.
         'for the sāman is not sung (by people) not having made
         the sound *hiṅ*'

    6: Given this change from 'subject-oriented' to 'agent-oriented' syn-
tax and given the fact that now all verbs can be passivized, it may appear
as if the distinction between active and passive has in effect become syn-
tactically irrelevant and is merely a matter of morphology. However, this
impression is not correct. While the passive subject has lost many of its
subject properties to the agent, it overtly retains at least one such proper-
ty, namely that of controlling agreement on the verb: The verb must agree
with the subject of its clause in person and number (or in case, gender,
and number, if it is a participle). And this is true both for active and
for passive sentences; cf. (xiv) and (xv).[7]

(xiv)   *sa katān karoti*
         sN pA   s3
         'he makes mats'

(xv)   *tena katāḥ kriyante*
         sI   pN   p3
         'mats are made by him'

    Moreover, passivization remains a syntactically important device for
the purpose of certain syntactic processes which reduce dependent clauses to
participial structures. In order to be able to apply, these processes re-
quire that the subject (and not just any other constituent) of the dependent
clause be identical with a given constituent of the main clause with which
subsequently the participle comes to agree in case, number, and gender; cf.
(xvi).

(xvi)(a) *yaḥ puruṣaḥ katān karoti tam paśyāmi*
            sN   pA   s3   sA
         'which man makes the mats, him I see' (= 'I see the
         man who makes the mats')

    (b) *katān kurvantam puruṣam paśyāmi*
          pA   sA   sA
         'I see the man (who is) making mats'

As a consequence, (xvii) below cannot undergo participialization, since the
noun phrase shared by main and dependent clause (namely *kaṭa-* 'mat') is an
object in the dependent clause. Through passivization, however, it can be
turned into a subject, and that (derived) subject then makes participializ-

ation possible; cf. (xviii) (a) and (b). That is, also as far as this pro-
cess is concerned, the derived passive subject has retained its subject pro-
perties, in spite of the change from subject-orientation to agent-orienta-
tion which has been noted for other syntactic processes.

(xvii)   *yān kaṭān (sa) karoti tān paśyāmi*
           pA   sN   s3   pA
           'which mats he makes, those I see'

(xviii) (a) *ye kaṭāḥ tena kriyante tān paśyāmi*
            pN   sI   p3   pA
            'which mats are made by him, those I see'

(b)   *tena kriyamāṇān kaṭān paśyāmi*
        sI   pA   pA
        'I see the mats (which are) being made by him'

7: Moreover, just as in English--and in early Sanskrit, for that mat-
ter--the morphological 'recoding' of the logical subject as something like ·
an adverbial phrase is accompanied by a semantic or pragmatic 'demotion' or
'deemphasis' of its subject-status, so also in the later Sanskrit language
the morphologically demoted agent frequently is deemphasized also semantic-
ally or pragmatically. And just like in English or early Sanskrit, this
semantic deemphasis may manifest itself in the outright deletion of the
agent. In fact, just like in English and early Sanskrit, passivization is
a favorite mechanism for avoiding specification of an agent for a given ac-
tion; cf. (xix) below, as well as (xii) and (xiii) above.[8] In Sanskrit, this
demotion is quite frequently employed also for the purposes of politeness:
Somehow, the use of a non-subject form for the addressee is equated with re-
ferring to that person in a less 'direct' manner and therefore more deferen-
tially, less like an equal; cf. (xx), (xxi).[9]

(xix)   *sampadaḥ eva kāmāya caturtham hūyate* (ŚB 3.1.4.2)
          'the fourth (libation in the ritual) is poured for the
          sake of completeness'

(xx)   *tataḥ bhavatā pratītya araṇyam nirvāsyatām* (Vet.24.20)
          'therefore by your lordship, having convinced your-
          self, she is to be banished to the forest' = 'May it
          please your lordship to banish her ...'

(xxi)   *yad annam mahyam dātavyam tad dīyatām* (Vet.76.9)
          'what food (is) to be given to me, that should be
          given' = 'please give that food ... to me'

8: Recent studies on the modern languages of South Asia have shown that
in these languages, in ways strikingly similar to what has here been observed
for post-Saṃhitā Sanskrit, the passive (and similar passive-like construc-
tions) only partly affects the subject properties both of the logical subject

(the agent) and of the derived, passive subject; cf. e.g. Kachru, Kachru and Bhatia 1976, and Pandharipande 1981. The latter study, moreover, claims that this pattern may be a part of the many linguistic features defining South Asia as a special linguistic area in which, through millenia of bilingual contact, the members of at least three genetically distinct language families have come to increasingly agree in their linguistic structure. This paper has shown that this pattern goes back as far as Brāhmaṇa-Sanskrit times. At the same time, however, it has also been demonstrated that a very different situation obtained in the earliest, Saṃhitā texts. This suggests that at least for this feature, the convergence between the South Asian languages must have started in the post-Saṃhitā period.[10]

NOTES

[1] Quotations are given with words in their 'prepausal' form and with accents omitted. For easier reference, major constituents are marked for case, number, and person as follows: N = nominative, A = accusative, I = instrumental; s = singular, p = plural; 1, 2, 3 = first, second, third persons. Wherever feasible, actually attested sentences have been quoted. However, where derivational relationships between sentences are to be illustrated, parallel sentences which differ only in their grammatical structure are hard to come by. In such cases, examples have had to be made up. All of these examples, however, conform to the rules of the language as they can be distilled from the actually attested texts. Sentences which are ungrammatical according to these rules are occasionally cited to demonstrate a point. They are marked as ungrammatical by a preposed asterisk (*). Finally, note the following textual abbreviations: Bh.G. = Bhagavad-Gītā, RV = Rig-Veda, ŚB = Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, TS = Taittirīya-Saṃhitā (contains both prose and mantra material), Vet. = Vetālapañcaviṃśati of Jambhaladatta (Emeneau's edition).

[2] There are only a few exceptions, which may be forerunners of the 'impersonal' passive of the later language. Thus in the Rig-Veda there are several attestations of transitive-verb passives in which the 'logical' object has not become the subject and where therefore the passive sentence has no grammatical subject. Cf. e.g. *apāyi asya andhasaḥ* (RV 2.19.1) 'of this juice was drunk (by him)' = 'he drank of this juice'. (Note that in these sentences the object appears in a case different from the accusative; and only accusative objects can become passive subjects.) There is in addition one probable example of a subject-less passive made from an intransitive, namely *nahi sthūri ṛtuthā yātam asti* (RV 10.131.3) 'for with-one-horse it is not driven well' = 'one does not drive well ...' Here again, there is no grammatical object which could be made the subject of the passive.

[3] The unmarked order of Sanskrit is verb-final. Stylistic considerations, however, can lead to many other, 'marked' orderings.

[4]Cf. Hock 1982 and In Press for further details.

[5]At the same time, however, the accusative-marked direct objects of transitive verbs continue to become subjects in the passive. Even the accusative complements of verbs of motion now optionally become passive subjects:

(a)   *sa grāmān gacchati*
         sN   pA   s3
         'he goes to the villages'

(b) pass.I: *tena grāmān gamyate*
            sI   pA   s3
            "by him going to the villages is undertaken"

(c) pass.II: *tena grāmāḥ gamyante*
             sI   pN   p3
             (same translation)

According to the grammarians, also the accusative-marked adverbials of time may become passive subjects, if used with intransitive verbs. Johnson (1974, 1977) claims that also indirect objects can undergo this process, provided the verb is marked as a causative passive. However, this latter claim is supported neither by the grammarians nor by actual usage.-- What complicates matters is that in the causative and also with certain non-causative verbs (such as *ji/jyā-* 'win, defeat') two accusative-marked noun phrases may appear in the active and that if only one of these is specified, either of them may become the passive subject; cf. (d) and (e) below. The question arises as to which of these 'objects' will become the passive subject if both are specified. This issue has been discussed by the Sanskrit grammarians (cf. e.g. Patañjali's commentary on Pāṇini 1.4.51) as well as recently by Ostler (1979). For the causatives see also Hock 1981. As far as I can see (and this supersedes my speculations in Hock 1981), the principle which best accounts for which of these 'objects' is selected is one which involves animacy and agency: The object which is more agentive or animate is selected for 'promotion' to passive subject; the other one remains in the accusative case. Cf. e.g. (f) below.

(d) act.   *vājam jināti*   'he wins the prize'
    pass.   *vājaḥ jīyate*   'the prize is won'

(e) act.   *śatrum jināti*   'he defeats the enemy'
    pass.   *śatruḥ jīyate*   'the enemy is defeated'

(f) act.   *śatrum vājam jināti* 'he defeats the enemy for the
            sA   sA   prize/wins it from him'
    pass.I *śatruḥ vājam jīyate* "the enemy is deprived of the
            sN   sA   prize"
    pass.II *śatrum vājaḥ jīyate*

[6]Cf. Hock 1982 and In Press, the latter also offering some speculations on how this later situation came about. Oertel (1929), apparently unaware of the change from subject-oriented to agent-oriented syntax, erroneously analyzed constructions like (xiii) as containing what might be called 'sloppy' absolutive constructions. Note that intransitive/reflexive -*ya*- formations at this stage clearly differ syntactically from the passive. For in the intransitive/reflexives, reflexivization and absolutive formation are con-

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trolled by the overt subject of the verb, not by some unnamed agent, or 'logical subject' of a corresponding active/transitive construction; cf. e.g. *yad jñātvā mokṣyase aśubhāt* (Bh.G.9.1) 'having come to know which, you will be released/get free from evil', not *'someone having come to know which, by that someone you will be released from evil'. It is therefore not surprising that constructions of this sort are permitted by the grammarians to be passivized, although examples of such passives (such as *odanena pacyate* "by the rice the action of cooking is undertaken") are difficult to locate in the actually attested texts.

[7]In impersonal passives, of course, there is no subject. Verb agreement marking therefore 'reverts' to the unmarked third singular (for finite verbs) or the nominative singular neuter (for non-finite verbs); cf. e.g. example (xi) and the second example cited in note 2 above.

[8]These pragmatic issues are addressed in greater detail in Wallace MS.

[9]The passive-like *ta*-participle, however, shows a quite different development, becoming a general, "ergative" past tense. Concerning this development cf. Hock In Press, with discussion of earlier views.

[10]It might finally be noted that the pattern of intransitive/reflexive -*ya*- formations discussed in section 3 and notes 6 and 7 above also is of some interest from the point of the Modern Indo-Aryan languages. In these languages we find patterns of the Hindi type trans. (a) vs. intr./refl. (b):

    (a) *us-ne guṛiyā toṛī*   'he broke the doll'

    (b) *guṛiyā ṭūṭī*   'the doll broke'

The type (b) is commonly said to derive from the Sanskrit passive. However, given the existence in Sanskrit of an already intransitive/reflexive -*ya*-formation, it may perhaps be preferable to directly link up type (b) with this latter formation. In that case, then, the Modern Indo-Aryan formation in question is not a relatively recent innovation but goes back to the earliest attested stages of Sanskrit.

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