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ON THE G E T AND THE B E PASSIVES IN ENGLISH

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.OBJECTIVES AND LAY-OUT. The goal of the present paper is to determine the differences underlying the usages of the two morphologically and semantically distinct passives in English. Special emphasis will be placed upon the g e t passive as a form whose status is still uncertain. For this reason, it will be profitable to look at some diachronic findings /section 2/, as well as to review a number of opinions expressed on the issue by both traditional and transformational grammarians /section 3/. Following this will be an analysis of the data obtained from the corpus /section 4/ and the pilot test /section 5/, and finally, some conclusions will be drawn from the discussion /section 6/.

1.2.SOME PRELIMINARY ASSUMPTIONS AND INTENTIONAL OMMISIONS. In the course of introductory analysis, certain points were taken for granted and thus excluded from the pilot test. It must be borne in mind, however, that while they appear less important than those to be discussed in sections 3 and 4, they do, in fact, constitute formal and stylistic differences between the two passives.

1.2.1.EXTRA AUXILIARY OF THE g e t PASSIVE. The fact that the passive auxiliary g e t requires d o, d o e s, and d i d in its simple present and simple past negative, interrogative and emphatic forms will be disregarded /see however § 5.2.7/, even though this has been claimed a sufficient enough difference to rule out its auxiliary status. Palmer /1965:167/, for instance, holds that since we do not find either

/i/ \*Gets he punished regularly ?

or

/ii/ \*He gotn't killed.

g e t is not really a helping verb. However, we shall

consider some more important structural and semantic evidence which will prove that regardless of the above deviation *g e t* has to be treated as the alternative passive auxiliary.

1.2.2.COMPLETE VERSUS TRUNCATED FORMS. Both passives can occur in complete or truncated forms, i.e. with or without an agent introduced by the preposition *b y*, though apparently truncated forms of both are more common /Janusz, 1977:4/. As pointed out by Langendoen /1969:119/, passives without agent generally express state rather than actions, for example :

/iii/ The little girl was hurt by the bully.

/iv/ The little girl was hurt.

His argument, however, is only true of the *b e* passive, for the contrast is no longer felt in the following pair :

/v/ The little girl got hurt by the bully.

/vi/ The little girl got hurt.

According to Sinha /1973:624/, the stative passive in /iv/ is to be treated as a copula plus adjective. On the other hand, *g e t* also forms constructions which formally resemble truncated passives, e.g. *g e t t i r e d* /cf. especially Svartvik, 1966 and Kimball, 1973/. In view of the complexity and proportions of the problem, in the present paper the passive versus adjective opposition will not be dealt with.

Consequently, the discussion of the underlying structure and the Passive transformation in section 3 will not be concerned with the *b y*-phrase deletion rule or with any other means to account for the truncated versus complete passive dichotomy. The problem is extensively presented in Freidin /1975/.

1.2.3.EXPANDED FORMS. The *g e t* passive lends itself to such expanded forms as future and perfective progressive constructions /Roberts, 1954:130 ; Pence and Emery, 1963:238/, e.g.

/vii/ Tomorrow at this time I shall be getting sworn in

as president.

/viii/ During the past week many of our group have been getting inoculated for typhus.

simply because the presence of one *b e* element would block the occurrence of *b e i n g* /hence *b e b e i n g* or *b e e n b e i n g* are impossible/. Similarly, *g e t* is blocked in the following sentence :

/ix/ \* You would wonder how so much food got gotten through by such a small child.

It seems obvious that the unacceptability of the above such forms is not caused by any significant semantic difference between the two passives; therefore, this problem will not be investigated any longer in the present paper.

1.2.4.CAUSATIVE *g e t*. Following Kimball /1973:208ff/ we assume that in sentences such as /x/ :

/x/ John got his dishes washed.

we do not deal with a passive at all, although an embedded passivized sentence is always contained there. Rather, we shall treat these as causative uses of the lexical verb *g e t*. See however § 3.2.5.

1.2.5.SECOND PASSIVE. *B e*, and never *g e t*, is the auxiliary of the Second Passive, for instance :

/xi/ John is believed to be an incurable alcoholic.

/xii/ It is believed that John is an incurable alcoholic.

The problem is not perhaps restricted to mere stylistic selections - *g e t* is supposed to be colloquial - but rather, from the semantic point of view *g e t* just does not seem acceptable in collocations with stative verbs like *b e l i e v e*, *t h i n k* etc.

## 2. HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

2.1.OLD ENGLISH : *w e s a n* VERSUS *w e o r ð a n*. The *b e* and *g e t* passive opposition in contemporary English, though relatively recent, is not a new consideration in the

development of the language, for a strong parallel can be drawn between the present situation and the Old English dichotomy of *w e s a n* and *w e o r ð a n*. It will prove valuable to present a few facts about *w e o r ð a n* as a passive auxiliary for the sake of comparison with the subsequent discussion of *g e t*.

Gleason /1963:386/ maintains that *w e s a n* and *w e o r ð a n* were used interchangeably with some verbs, despite a slight difference in meaning. Strang /1970:151/, however, believes that the latter verb "... never established more than a marginal role as an auxiliary." According to Traugott /1972:83/, *w e o r ð a n* approximated the present use of *g e t* in that the sense of "becoming" was strong. She also points out that it was less formal than *w e s a n*.

Several reasons are given to attribute the mysterious loss of *w e o r ð a n* in Middle English: foreign influence /Frary, 1929/, irregularity /Jespersen, 1931/, and heavy form /Curme, 1931; he also expresses hope /p.446/ that "... *g e t*, unlike Old English *w e o r ð a n*, is a light, handy word that gives promise of a long period of usefulness."/

2.2.THE FIRST RECORD OF *g e t* AS AN AUXILIARY. The earliest printed evidence of the *g e t* passive is from 1652 /*g o t a c q u a i n t e d*/, after which no further examples are found until the 18th century works of authors such as Fielding, Sterne and Goldsmith /for more details see Jespersen, 1931, Curme, 1931, Fries, 1940, and Strang, 1970/.

### 3. VARIOUS TREATMENTS

3.1.TRADITIONAL APPROACHES. The following are comments from major traditional grammars of English as well as from related works on the subject, published during the last fifty years.

Poutsma /1926-1929:1.30;2:2.99/: "When connected with a past participle *t o g e t* is apt to lose its character

of a copula and assume a function which differs little from that of *t o b e* as an auxiliary of the passive voice. The altered function of *t o g e t*, of course, postulates a change in the grammatical function of the participle, which, from being mainly adjectival, becomes almost purely verbal ... Naturally the participle is not so entirely devoid of adjectival characteristics in these combinations as it is in a pure passive. Instances with *t o g e t* are quite common, especially in colloquial style ... The combinations with *t o g e t*... are hardly distinguishable from a purely passive construction with *t o b e* ... *T o g e t*, when connected with a past participle, has lost almost entirely its power of indicating incipient action and may, accordingly, be called an auxiliary of the passive voice..."

Frary /1929:73/: "*G e t*,...in spite of constant efforts of grammarians and teachers of English, has not been abolished, but rather seems to be increasing in favor in the common idiom."

Jespersen /1931:108;274/: "*G e t*...has /or had/ a decidedly more colloquial colouring. ...the verbs *b e c o m e* and, especially in colloquial speech, *g e t*, are more and more used where *b e* would be more ambiguous ..."

Curme /1931:445f/: "Alongside of the literary passive with *b e* and the past participle is a common, more expressive, colloquial form conjugated with *g e t* instead of *b e*... In *b e* the idea of state so overshadows that of ingression or action that its establishment as an auxiliary in the actional passive is a great misfortune for our language. This lack of an adequate form in the literary language to express action has led in colloquial speech to the use of a more expressive actional form, namely *g e t*...hence fitted for the expression of action. ... If this expressive, actional, passive form with the auxiliary *g e t*, already quite common colloquially, ever becomes established in

literary English, it will be a decided gain to the language."

Curme /1935:218/: "Effective *b e* indicates an act, but unfortunately *b e* does not always have this meaning. It more commonly indicates a state, retaining the old meaning of *i s.* ...There is a strong drift in England and America to employ *b e* to denote a state and use effective *g e t* to denote an act..."

Fries /1940:193/: "...this particular combination of *g e t* with the past participle appears in both the Standard English materials and those of Vulgar English..., however, it occurs more frequently in Vulgar English."

Roberts /1954:129f/: "The *g e t* form of the passive is well established in General English, and it is hardly rare in Choice English, though it still has a colloquial ring that keeps it somewhat below the salt. All levels of English might make use of it, for it enables us to differentiate between two meanings now expressed by the *b e* form. Consider this: "The police say the man *w a s s h o t* when they found him, but they don't know when he *w a s s h o t*." The police apparently are contradicting themselves."

Francis /1958:335/: "Another passive, formed with *g e t* as auxiliary and the past participle, seems to be increasing in frequency, though grammarians are at present not agreed as to its status."

Zandvoort /1960:57/: "*G e t*...expresses the getting into a state or situation denoted by the participle; in other words, it has a mutative meaning, which distinguishes it from the ordinary passive."

Strang /1962:146/: "In a sense, any passive construction implies that a process has taken place, that there has been a change or mutation from one state to another. But although this implication is inescapable, the ordinary English passive does not explicitly direct attention to it. There is, however, an extra set of forms, particularly in informal or spoken English, which does explicitly direct attention to the change of condition involved, and which, accordingly,

I have labelled MUTATIVES. The operators used are g e t / g e t s / g e t t i n g / g o t ..."

Pence and Emery /1963:248/ : "Another less common form of the passive makes use of the auxiliary g e t plus the past participle... This form, commonly encountered at colloquial levels of usage, is now established at Standard English. The g e t form is useful in focusing emphasis upon the resultant state or condition..."

Svartvik /1966:149/ : "The only serious contender to b e as agentive passive auxiliary is g e t. But it is rare... Although it is probably symptomatic that the occurrences in the corpus are either from speech or written dialogue, there is no indication in our material that the g e t-passive is common in colloquial English."

Quirk et al. /1972:802f/ : "The passive auxiliary is normally b e. Its only serious contender is g e t, which however is usually restricted to constructions without an expressed animate agent : "The boy got hurt on his way from work." ...G e t is much more common as a 'resulting copula' in sentences which look superficially like the passive but cannot have an agent."

Brook /1973:168/ : "Some words, such as... g e t, are avoided because excessive use makes fastidious writers unwilling to employ them."

Leech and Svartvik /1975:259/ : "The passive auxiliary is normally b e, but can sometimes be g e t. The passive with g e t is normally found only in informal style, and in constructions without an agent..."

Rutherford /1975:168/ : "Passives with g e t differ quite sharply from passives with b e. G e t passives can usually occur only with process verbs /as opposed to stative verbs/... With many verbs g e t passives indicate involvement of the GRAMMATICAL subject, b e passives of the LOGICAL subject... G e t passives can also indicate that the speaker views what he is saying as unfavorable. B e passives are neutral in this respect."

It follows from the above quotations that /a/ the g e t

passive is more often than not believed to be a common structure /though less frequent than the b e passive/, employed largely in colloquial English, but hardly unusual in standard English, and that /b/ the g e t passive is actional whereas the b e passive is statal.

3.2.TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACHES. It is somewhat distressing that the problem has been generally ignored in major transformational grammars of English. We are, therefore, practically limited to four articles, i.e. Hasegawa /1968/, R.Lakoff /1971/, Kimball /1973/, and Gee /1974/, all of which are nevertheless valuable contributions.

3.2.1.UNDERLYING REPRESENTATIONS. The first problem to be discussed in this sub-section is whether the two passives have different underlying structures. The starting point here is to assume that, following Katz and Postal /1964/ and Chomsky /1965/, active and passive sentences are derived from different underlying structures, and that the Passive rule is obligatory :

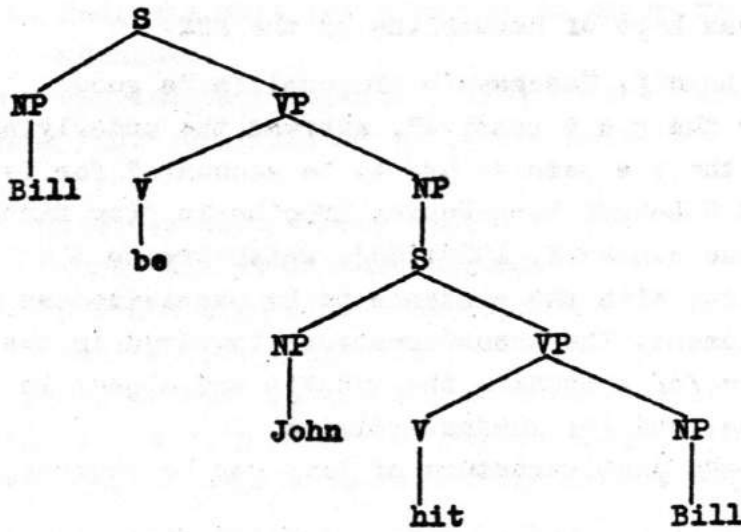
/xlii/ Passive

NP Aux V X NP' Y by Passive Z

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9  $\Rightarrow$  5, 2 + be + en, 3, 4, 6, 7, 1, 9  
/cf. Hasegawa, 1968:230/.

Hasegawa has proposed a formula that was intended to rectify the one shown above. This more recent formula is based on the principle that the sentence to be passivized is embedded as an object complement of the verb b e, whose subject is the superficial subject, ergo the logical direct object of the passive sentence. Hasegawa then states that g e t plus the past participle is also very similar to verbs taking sentence complements, but that b e and g e t passives, while behaving in much the same manner, cannot be treated as variants of the same passive formative because they differ in meaning. However, as pointed out by Lakoff, such a representation, as exemplified by /xiv/,

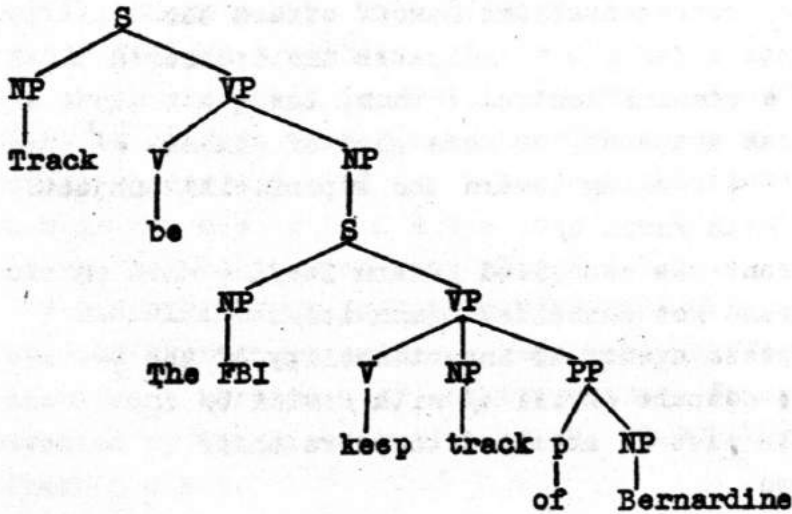




/xiv/ Bill was hit by John.

would virtually neutralize that semantic difference, since underlyingly the two structures would simply have different verbs in the higher sentence.

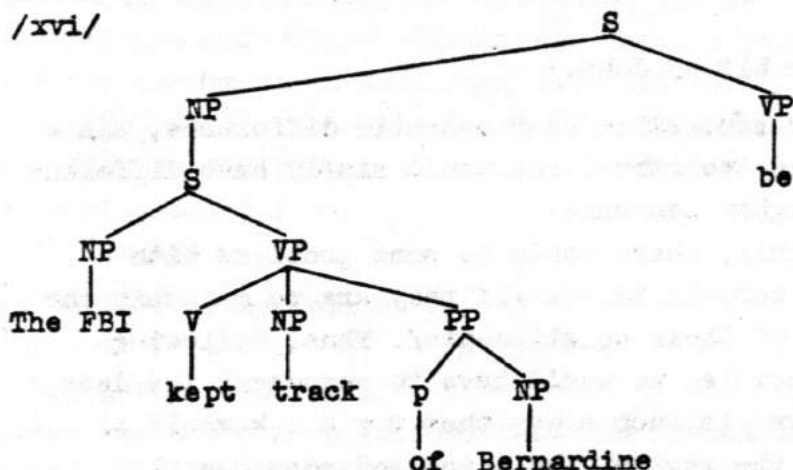
Aside from this, there would be some problems with accounting for certain idioms /if they are to maintain the inseparability of their constituents/. Thus, following Hasegawa's principle, we would have to represent the deep structure of /xv/ in such a way that t r a c k would be separated from the rest of the idiom and consequently devoid of its idiomatic sense :



/xv/ Track was kept of Bernardine by the FBI.

According to Lakoff, Hasegawa's proposal is "a good candidate for the *g e t* passive", whereas the underlying structure of the *b e* passive has to be accounted for by the so-called G.Lakoff-Ross-Postal hypothesis /for further information see R.Lakoff, 1971:153/, which treats *b e* as the higher verb, with the sentence to be passivized as its SUBJECT complement. The transformations involved in the derivation are /a/ switching the subject and object in the lower sentence, and /b/ subject-raising.

Accordingly, the deep structure of /xv/ can be represented as /xvi/ :



3.2.2.LAKOFF'S JUSTIFICATION. In support of the difference in underlying representations Lakoff offers the following arguments : /a/ *G e t* indicates the speaker's attitude while *b e* remains neutral ; thus, the *g e t* passive can express sympathy, or some sort of either negative or positive feeling toward the superficial subject. Compare /xvii a/ with /xvii b/ :

/xvii/ a. Our grant was cancelled /?darn it!/.  
 b. Our grant got cancelled /darn it!/.  
 /b/ *G e t* can express agency or intentionality of the surface subject ; compare /xviii a/ with /xviii b/ :

/xviii/a/?Radicals must be arrested to prove their machismo.

machismo.

b. Radicals must get arrested to prove their machismo.

/c/ G e t can indicate responsibility on the part of the underlying /not superficial/ subject ; compare /xix a/ and /xix b/ :

/xix/ a. "How was this window opened ?" "We used an old fork, and it finally worked."

b. "How did this window get opened ?" "Sir, I cannot tell a lie: I did it."

/d/ G e t can be used in inchoative sense, as in /xx/ :

/xx/ After a lot of pushing in commercials, the claim of Zotz, the miracle detergent, finally got believed.

3.2.3.KIMBALL'S CRITICISM. For Kimball, the evidence adduced by Lakoff does not hold for all dialects. Besides, it seems to him that the difference in terms of speaker attitude etc. does not necessarily reflect any difference in underlying structure between the two English passive. He then points out that Lakoff, in her treatment of the g e t passive, has failed to show the ambiguity which can exist between agentive and nonagentive readings of the lexical verb g e t, as exemplified by /xxi a,b/ :

/xxi/ a. Carol got a book /for her mother/. = AGENTIVE

b. Carol got a book /from her mother/. = NONAGENTIVE

Kimball believes that in /xx/ there just is no agent, whereas in, what he calls, standard g e t passives, such as /xxii/, there can be no ambiguity :

/xxii/ Joe got arrested.

His argument, then, is that, contrary to Lakoff's belief, there is no real verb g e t underlying the g e t passive. Rather, occurrences of g e t are derived from inchoatives such as c o m e t o h a v e or c o m e t o b e, which undergo lexicalization /see also § 3.2.5/.

3.2.4.DIFFERENCE IN CONSTITUENT STRUCTURE. Gee has observed that there exists a remarkable difference in the constituent structure of the two passive formatives as revealed by the distribution of the TEMPORAL use of the adverb j u s t.

Compare /xxiii a,b/ with /xxiv a,b/ :

/xxiii/ a. The thief was just caught by the police.  
b.\*The thief just was caught by the police.

/xxiv/ a.\*The thief got just caught by the police.  
b. The thief just got caught by the police.

3.2.5.CATALYTIC PASSIVE. There is a reflexive construction of the g e t passive that has no counterpart in the b e passive ;

compare /xxv a/ with /xxv b/ :

/xxv/ a.\*The thief was himself caught by the police.  
b. The thief got himself caught by the police.

Gee /1974:2/: "... /xxv b/ is ambiguous between a reading where the thief is an Agent, causing his own arrest and one where he is merely an Experiencer of the events described." In his analysis, Gee considers sentences with the Experiencer reading /which he calls HAPPENSTANCE/ as undergoing redundant reflexive deletion, e.g. i t s e l f in /xxvi/: /xxvi/.The vase got broken by the girl scout.

This is exactly what Barber /1975/ has called CATALYTIC PASSIVE. His argument is as follows /p. 22/: "The choice of a form like T h e w i n d o w g o t b r o k e n o v e r T h e w i n d o w w a s b r o k e n seems to imply that the window somehow brought the catastrophe onto itself --if only by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Its presence, as it were, catalyses the action performed by a quite separate agent. This observation is reinforced by the notable ease with which the reflexive pronoun can be added to the g e t passive..., contrasted with the impossibility of doing so to the true passive." Further support is provided by some typological data. In French, for example, roughly the same difference can be rendered by the comparison between the true passive /which is, however, rare/ on the one hand and the so-called FALSE, REFLEXIVE on the other, as illustrated by /xxvii a,b/ :

/xxvii/ a. Les portes sont fermées par nous /et pas par le concierge/. "The doors are closed by u s / and

not by the doorman/."

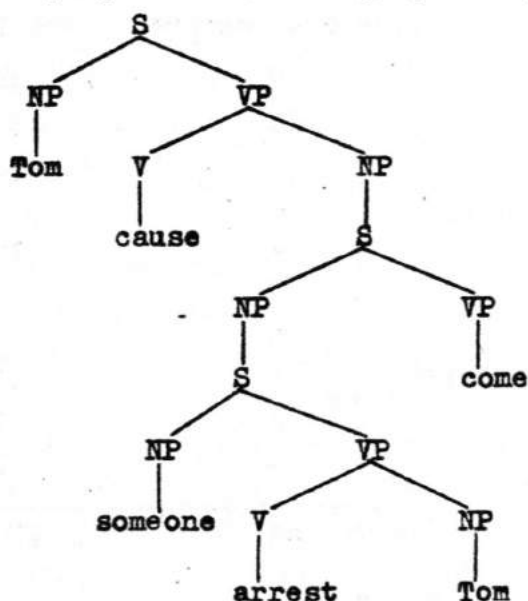
- b. Les portes se ferment à deux heures. "The doors get /themselves/ closed at two o'clock."

According to Kimball, however, a truncated catalytic passive like /xxviii/

/xxviii/ Tom got himself arrested.

is to be interpreted as a type of causative construction with an underlying structure roughly like /xxix/ :

/xxix/



The causative sense is derived from /xxix/ in the following way : /a/ Passive applies on the lower cycle, and then /b/ two steps of Predicate Raising apply on succeeding cycles. Finally, /c/ Reflexive and /d/ the lexicalization of b e + c o m e + c a u s e take place.

In any case, what we have assumed to be a catalytic passive is considered to be some kind of agentive passive by the three authors cited in this sub-section. It constitutes a rather significant difference between the g e t and b e passives.

3.3.CONCLUSION. As we have seen, there are altogether many reasons why the g e t and b e passives should be treated as independent formatives, rather than as two variants of the category passive voice. The next step will

be to analyse these theoretical findings on the basis of the data contained in the corpus as well as the test results.

#### 4. EVIDENCE FROM THE CORPUS

4.1. TABLE. Below is a table showing the occurrences of the two English passives in the corpus /for details see References/, altogether amounting to approximately 80,000 words :

TYPE OF STRUCTURE	g e t passive	b e passive
SIMPLE PRESENT	7	32
SIMPLE PAST	20	139
PRESENT PROGRESSIVE	-	1
PAST PROGRESSIVE	6	9
PRESENT PERFECT	-	10
SIMPLE FUTURE	-	1
MODAL	5	11
g o i n g to + INFINITIVE	4	13
GERUND	2	7
IMPERATIVE	-	1
TOTAL	44	224

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4.2. CONCLUSIONS. The purpose of the above frequency count was to estimate the occurrence and structural distribution of the g e t and b e passives in a specific type of colloquial discourse /some of the interviews analysed were claimed to have been very faithful transcripts of the original tape recordings/. The choice of the sources was prompted by an assumption based on the findings from an earlier section of this paper - the more colloquial the discourse, the better the chance for the g e t passive to occur.

The statistics presented in the table present some significant findings, from which the following conclusions can be drawn :

/a/ the b e passive is much more frequent than the g e t

passive ; /b/ both passives are more common in simple tense forms than in other forms ; /c/ both passives are found more often in the Simple Past than elsewhere ; /d/ both passives are less frequent in the Present Progressive than in the Past Progressive ; /e/ the g e t passive is probably rare in the Present Perfect. The other findings of the frequency count are less significant for our purposes.

#### 5. EVIDENCE FROM THE TEST

In order to verify the hypotheses posed by the authors cited and discussed in section 3, as well as a few more suggestions not dealt with previously in the present paper, we shall now analyse the results of our pilot test.

5.1.FORM OF THE TEST. 45 native speakers of American English were asked to answer inquiry sheets with 13 speech situations, each containing a passive structure. The respondents were requested to decide whether the passive auxiliary should be /a/ b e, /b/ g e t, or /c/ either. They were instructed to encircle the letter representing their choice and were also encouraged to make some short comments justifying their selection. The following discussion contains some valuable contributions made by those anonymous informants. No data concerning their age, geographical and social dialect, etc. are available. The test itself was based on seven sentences taken from Lakoff /1971/, one sentence from each of the following : Jespersen /1934/, Curme /1935/, Scheurweghs /1959/, and Huddleston /1971/ /for further details see Appendix/, and two original sentences.

It was meant to check whether the examples illustrating the above linguists' hypotheses win the approval of native speakers of English.

5.2.RESULTS. The discussion of the results of the test will be presented as a series of analyses of the individual hypotheses.

5.2.1.HYPOTHESIS: The *g e t* passive expresses personal involvement of the speaker, whereas the *b e* passive is emotionally unmarked. This rather important issue was covered by four items in the questionnaire :

- /xxx/ SITUATION: A friend of yours helped out in a coffee shop one afternoon, as some of the staff were ill. Later, he was thanked by the manager but got no money. Commenting on the situation you might say :
- "It's a damn shame
- |                                           |     |
|-------------------------------------------|-----|
| a. that he wasn't paid for the work."     | 38% |
| b. that he didn't get paid for the work." | 53% |
| c. NO PREFERENCE                          | 9%  |

Here the informality and personal attitude favour the *g e t* passive and it was chosen by more than fifty per cent of the informants. The comments justifying this choice stressed such features as exasperation, excitement, dismay, and a presumably forceful tone of voice as characteristic of the *g e t* version.

- /xxxi/ SITUATION: A woman talks to a friend about her husband's failures at work. She might say :
- "He gets the bad reports from his clients
- |                                          |     |
|------------------------------------------|-----|
| a. but the good ones are never written." | 45% |
| b. but the good ones never get written." | 53% |
| c. NO PREFERENCE                         | 2%  |

Here, too, the attitude of the speaker is very strongly felt, which may have resulted in the preference of the *g e t* passive ; several respondents, however, said that the auxiliary *g e t* matched the earlier occurrence of the lexical verb *g e t* in the sentence.

- /xxxii/ SITUATION: The chairman of some linguistics department is very worried about its future. He might say:
- "This department is going to hell! Six linguists
- |                                                |     |
|------------------------------------------------|-----|
| a. were arrested for possession of marijuana." | 60% |
| b. got arrested for possession of marijuana."  | 33% |
| c. NO PREFERENCE                               | 7%  |

/xxxiii/SITUATION: The arrest is then reported on the radio.



The newscaster might say :

"At the University of Throgg this afternoon, six linguists

- a. were arrested for possession of marijuana." 100%
- b. got arrested for possession of marijuana." 0
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0

What is significant in the above pair is the considerable difference in percentage between /xxxii b/ and /xxxiii b/, which nicely delineates the limits of the g e t passive occurrence.

Situation /xxxiii/ is very clear - the expected b e received all the votes. In /xxxii/, where g e t seems quite natural but certainly not exclusive, the comments in favour of the g e t passive emphasized the excitement of the speaker and the agentive /cf. § 3.2.5/ character of the passive with the reading of "got themselves arrested". Some respondents, however, felt that h a v e g o t t e n a r r e s t e d would have been more appropriate. The comments which favoured b e referred to the fact that the speaker is after all a chairman, and therefore one should expect the "correct" usage.

On the whole, the first hypothesis has proved to be correct. Both the results and the comments have shown that the g e t passive may be selected, if not preferred, where the speaker is emotionally involved in what he is saying.

5.2.2.HYPOTHESIS: The g e t passive, unlike the b e passive, can imply responsibility on the part of the underlying subject. The following two items were expected to verify the above hypothesis :

- /xxxiv/ SITUATION: Somebody opened a cage in a school lab and a valuable exotic bird flew out. The angry teacher is trying to find the perpetrator. He might ask a group of little boys standing near the cage:
- a. "How was this cage opened ?" 22%
  - b. "How did this cage get opened?" 73%
  - c. NO PREFERENCE 5%

/xxxv/ SITUATION: An exotic bird was sick but no one was able to open the cage to provide help. Then somebody used an old fork and it finally worked. The curious teacher might ask :

- |                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| a. "How was this cage opened ?"     | 84% |
| b. "How did this cage get opened ?" | 11% |
| c. NO PREFERENCE                    | 5%  |

The results support our hypothesis; the g e t passive suggesting responsibility of the underlying subject in /xxxiv/ and the neutral b e passive in /xxxv/ received a very high percentage of the informants' votes, who in their comments said that they saw the two items as juxtaposition of two different question situations : /a/ something like "Who /the hell/ did this and how could they?" versus /b/ "What was the method?". They also described the contrast in terms of anger and excitement of the speaker.

5.2.3.HYPOTHESIS: The b e passive can express the involvement or agency of the logical subject /especially with modals/, whereas the g e t passive is concerned with the superficial subject. Three items were meant to test the hypothesis:

/xxxvi/ SITUATION: Somebody expresses his views. He might say:

- |                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| a. "Radicals must be arrested"  | 95% |
| b. "Radicals must get arrested" | 5%  |
| c. NO PREFERENCE                | 0   |

if we are to keep the Commies from overrunning the U.S."

/xxxvii/ SITUATION: It has just been realized that the conference on accurate planning will have more participants than previously planned. However, the man in charge of the arrangements is not worried. He might say :

- |                                                       |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------|
| a. "These few extra people can be coped with easily." | 100% |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------|

- b. "These few extra people can get coped with easily." 0
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0

/xxxviii/ SITUATION: You meet a friend in front of a hospital in which you have just been visiting someone. Assuming that he, too, is going to visit someone, you ask him about it. He might say :

- a. "No, I'm going there to be X-rayed." 38%
- b. "No, I'm going there to get X-rayed." 49%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 13%

The above data indicate that the hypothesis is true. In the passive versions of b e in /xxxvi/ and /xxxvii/, the obligation and the ability, respectively, refer to the logical /underlying/ subjects of these sentences. The g e t passives in the respective sentences, as was emphasized in the comments, would mean some involvement of the surface subjects, which in /xxxvi/, for instance, would result in a very dubious reading of volition on the part of radicals.

In /xxxviii/, the hypothesis was supported by almost 50 per cent of the informants, and there is a considerably high /as compared with the remaining items in the questionnaire/ percentage of NO PREFERENCE answers.

5.2.4.HYPOTHESIS: The b e passive, unlike the g e t passive, can express the sense of a verb of creating /see however the following sub-section/. The test contained one item checking the above hypothesis :

/xxxix/ SITUATION: In his introductory lecture on house building, the lecturer might say :

- a. "A house can be built of stone, brick or clay." 95%
- b. "A house can get built of stone, brick or clay." 5%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0

Here, again, the results show that the hypothesis is correct. However, in order to get a clear view of the problem in

sentences such as /xxxix b/, we would have to devise a completely separate test checking the g e t passive against modals such as c a n, m a y or m u s t in their various functions. For the time being, though, we can look at 5.2.5., which is related to the present problem.

5.2.5.HYPOTHESIS: The g e t passive, unlike the b e passive, can have inchoative meaning. The result of the test, as performed by /xl/, seems to refute this hypothesis:

/xl/ SITUATION: You and your neighbour talk about the house across the street, and it seems that neither of you likes it. One of you might say:

"A shoddy house like that

- |                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| a. can be built in 10 days."  | 89% |
| b. can get built in 10 days." | 11% |
| c. NO PREFERENCE              | 0   |

Only 11 per cent of the informants decided that g e t should be the passive auxiliary in /xl/ ; some apparently did so feeling the contrast between /xxxix/ and /xl/, which they described in their comments as the "correct" /lecture situation/ or "public" versus "informal" statement. The opponents of g e t rejected the inchoative meaning claiming that "an inanimate noun can't g e t", which is of course incompatible with the much more favourable reception of a similar sentence in /xxxi/.

In a pilot test of this sort and size it is very difficult to avoid any overlapping of hypotheses, yet here it at least enables us to double-check the informants.

5.2.6.HYPOTHESIS: The opposition between the g e t and the b e passive can sometimes be described as action versus state. The hypothesis was tested by the following item :

/xli/ SITUATION: Two friends gossip about a movie star.

One of them might say :

"He is married

- |                                               |     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|
| a. but I can't tell you when he was married." | 22% |
| b. but I can't tell you when he got married." | 73% |

c. NO PREFERENCE

5%

The majority of the respondents, as expected, chose g e t, and they stated in their comments that b e would have sounded like a contradiction, that is, it would imply that the star is no longer married. Some other comments stressed the informal type of discourse, for which g e t is suitable. Thus, another hypothesis appears to be correct.

5.2.7.HYPOTHESIS: The g e t passive can be more emphatic than the b e passive in certain structures owing to the presence of emphatic d o, d o e s, and d i d. The following item was used :

/xlii/ SITUATION: Excerpt from a play :

X: "No man goes to battle to be killed."

Y: a. "But they are killed."

27%

b. "But they do get killed."

71%

c. NO PREFERENCE

2%

My sister's husband was killed in battle."

Here, again, as expected, most of the informants chose g e t, which thus seems to verify our hypothesis. The comments indicate that the respondents feel the b e passive version to have a rather total application, therefore, the sense of "some are nevertheless killed" is stronger in the g e t passive version.

5. CONCLUSIONS

6.1.ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS. In the previous sections a wide range of facts and hypotheses were presented in order to define the basic differences between the assumed two passive formatives in English. It is now time to recapitulate the main points. This can best be done in the form of a table :

	THE G E T PASSIVE	THE B E PASSIVE
1.ORIGIN	Modern English /available since the 17th century/	Old English
2.OCCURRENCE	spoken discourse; less common than the b e passive	spoken and written discourse
3.STYLE	informal	formal and informal
4.UNDERLYING REPRESENTATIONS	? sentence to undergo passivization is embedded as an object complement of g e t	? sentence to undergo passivization is embedded as a subject complement of b e
5.OCCURRENCE IN TERMS OF STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION	forms with auxiliary d o, d o e s, d i d	no additional auxiliary /unless imperative/
	expanded forms/future and perfect progressive/	no counterpart
	no counterpart	Second Passive
	reflexive/Catalytic/form	no counterpart
	revealing the speaker's attitude :personal involvement, sympathy or positive /negative feeling for the superficial subject	neutral
	implying responsibility on the part of the underlying subject	neutral
	implying agency or intentionality of the superficial subject	implying agency or intentionality of the underlying subject
	actional	statal and actional
	emphatic	neutral

T A B L E II

Although the account for differences between the b e and

the *g e t* passives presented in this paper is by no means exhaustive, it can safely be stated that there exist two independent passive formatives in English which are morphologically distinct and, what is more important, whose differences in terms of meaning and style seem to give some relation of complementary distribution.

The results of the pilot test itself, however, have to be approached with some caution. With only a dozen or so contexts analysed by around fifty respondents, the test can at best be treated as a sample of native speakers' judgements, which tentatively support most of the hypotheses discussed in the paper.

#### 6.2.SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY.

6.2.1.SELECTIONAL RESTRICTIONS. In the present paper, no attempt has been made to select some classes of verbs which collocate in their participial forms more readily with either *g e t* or *b e*, apart from the general observation that *g e t* does not occur with stative verbs. However, even among the action verbs which occur with *g e t*, some seem to do so with particular ease /cf. *g e t c a u g h t*, *a r r e s t e d*, *b u s t e d*, *k i l l e d*, *s h o t*, *i n j u r e d*, *h u r t*, *b r o k e n*, *t o r n*, etc./, while others remain less tolerant. It would be interesting to determine which classes of verbs require or prefer one auxiliary and not the other.

Another test for selectional restrictions could be given for idiomatic phrases of which a passive auxiliary is part, e.g. *b e a d m i t t e d t o t h e b a r*. It may be possible that no replacement by the alternative auxiliary can be made.

6.2.2.NEGATION AND CONTRASTIVE STRESS. Sullivan /1976:139/ claims that the *g e t* passive is sensitive to contrastive sentence stress and negation. For example, with modal stress and the appropriate intonation /xlɪɪɪ a/ implies that the window is not broken :

/xlɪɪɪ/ a. The window didn't get broken by Ed.

b. The window wasn't broken by Ed.

On the other hand, /xliii b/ does, according to Sullivan, imply that the window is broken. The reason for that is the following: "...negation in /xliii a/ affects the dynamic nature of the act, negating g e t ; but negatin in /xliii b/ denies the identification of E d as the agent of breakage, and does not affect 'the act itself at all.'" While Sullivan's argument is controversial, for contexts can be generated that give both readings for /xliii a/ and /xliii b/ alike, it nevertheless suggests some possible further study : the two English passives as seen through the concept of factivity /cf. Kiparsky and Kiparsky, 1971/.

6.2.3.PASSIVE TRANSFORMATION. According to Hudson /1976: 155ff/, transformational grammar has been far from successful in trying to formulate a satisfactory passive transformation, in spite of a large number of different analyses of the problem. Claiming that, in transformational grammar, passives have often been used as evidence for the need for transformation, Hudson lists several faults from which the transformational approaches suffer. Aside from such strong objections as having to add an extra node for the passive auxiliary in the transformation, or the failure to account for the truncated passives, he also raises an objection concerning the subject of this paper /p.156/ : showing "...no connection between b e passives and g e t passives." A study could be attempted that would account for the differences between the two passive formatives along Hudson's daughter dependency analysis or other approach free from a passive transformation /e.g. Freidin, 1975/.

#### APPENDIX

##### PILOT TEST

1. SITUATION: A friend of yours helped out in a coffee shop one afternoon, as some of the staff were ill. Later, he was thanked by the manager but got no money. Commenting on the situation you might say :

"It's a damn shame

a. that he wasn't paid for the work."

38%



- b. that he didn't get paid for the work." 53%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 9%
2. /Scheurweghs, 1959/ SITUATION: A woman talks to a friend about her husband's failures at work. She might say :
- "He gets the bad reports from his clients
- a. but the good ones are never written." 45%
- b. but the good ones never get written." 53%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 2%
3. /Lakoff, 1971/ SITUATION: The chairman of some linguistic department is very worried about its future. He might say :
- "This department is going to hell ! Six linguists
- a. were arrested for possession of marijuana." 60%
- b. got arrested for possession of marijuana." 33%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 7%
4. /Lakoff, 1971/ SITUATION: The arrest is then reported on the radio. The newscaster might say:
- "At the University of Throgg this afternoon, six linguists
- a. were arrested for possession of marijuana." 100%
- b. got arrested for possession of marijuana." 0
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0
5. /Lakoff, 1971/ SITUATION: Somebody opened a cage in a school lab and a valuable exotic bird flew out. The angry teacher is trying to find the perpetrator. He might ask a group of little boys standing near the cage :
- a. "How was this cage opened ?" 22%
- b. "How did this cage get opened ?" 73%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 5%
6. /Lakoff, 1971/ SITUATION: An exotic bird was sick but no one was able to open the cage to provide help. Then somebody used an old fork and it finally worked. The curious teacher might

ask :

- a. "How was this cage opened ?" 84%
- b. "How did this cage get opened ?" 11%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0

7. /Lakoff, 1971/ SITUATION: Somebody expresses his views.

He might say :

- a. "Radicals must be arrested" 95%
- b. "Radicals must get arrested" 5%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0

if we are to keep the Commies from overrunning the U.S."

8. SITUATION: It has just been realized that the conference on accurate planning will have more participants than previously scheduled. However, the man in charge of the arrangements is not worried. He might say :

- a. "These few extra people can be coped with easily." 100%
- b. "These few extra people can get coped with easily." 0
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0

9. /Huddleston, 1971/ SITUATION: You meet a friend in front of a hospital in which you have just been visiting someone.

Assuming that he, too, is going to visit someone, you ask him about it.

He might answer :

- a. "No, I'm going there to be X-rayed." 38%
- b. "No, I'm going there to get X-rayed." 49%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 13%

10. /Lakoff, 1971/ SITUATION: In his introductory lecture on house building, the lecturer might say :

- a. "A house can be built of stone, brick or clay." 95%
- b. "A house can get built of stone, brick or clay." 5%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0

11. /Lakoff, 1971/ SITUATION: You and your neighbour talk about the house across the street, and it seems that neither of you likes it. One of you might say :

- a. "A shoddy house like that can be built in 10 days." 89%
- b. "A shoddy house like that can get built in 10 days." 11%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 0
12. /Curme, 1935/ SITUATION: Two friends gossip about a movie star. One of them might say :  
"He is married"
- a. but I can't tell you when he was married." 22%
- b. but I can't tell you when he got married." 73%
- c. NO PREFERENCE 5%
13. /Jespersen, 1931/ SITUATION: Excerpt from a play :  
X: "No man goes to battle Y: a. "But they are killed.  
to be killed." 27%  
b. "But they do get killed." 71%  
c. NO PREFERENCE 2%
- My sister's husband was killed in battle."

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"ROLLING STONE" : 1. Nov. 3rd 1977  
2. June 29th 1978  
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KONSTRUKCJE BIERNE Z "get" I "be" W JĘZYKU ANGIELSKIM

streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy kontrowersyjnego problemu istnienia w języku angielskim dwu różnych morfologicznie i niezależnych semantycznie konstrukcji biernych: z użyciem czasownika posiłkowego *be* i, nowszej historycznie, z użyciem czasownika posiłkowego *get*. We wstępnych partiach pracy przedstawiono tło teoretyczne powyższego problemu, na które złożył się szereg argumentów zebranych z gramatyk tradycyjnych oraz publikacji opartych na podstawie założeń nowszych teorii językoznawczych. W toku rozważań stwierdzono między innymi, że konstrukcja bierna z *get* nadaje się do wyrażania akcji bardziej niż konstrukcja z *be*, lepiej

pasuje do stylu potocznego oraz prawdopodobnie generowana jest z innej struktury podpowierzchniowej. W dalszej części artykułu przedstawiono wyniki obliczenia częstości występowania obu konstrukcji biernych we współczesnej potocznej angielszczyźnie, które wskazują na szersze zastosowanie czasownika posiłkowego *be*. Pokażną część pracy zajęła następnie analiza sądów rodzimych użytkowników języka angielskiego /dialekt: *American English*/. Omówiono tam wyniki testu sprawdzającego użycie interesujących nas konstrukcji biernych w 13 kontekstach, spreparowanych jako próby hipotez prezentowanych w teoretycznej części artykułu. Przeważająca większość tych wyników zdaje się potwierdzać słuszność założenia przyjętego przed rozpoczęciem badań. Wnioski wypływające z części teoretycznej i praktycznej ujęto w tabeli.