Non-active Voices in Kurdish and Baxtiari: Filling a Paradigmatic Gap

Atefeh Shahbazi — Göttingen University
Gholam Hossein Karimi-Doostan — Tehran University

Non-active voice (henceforth, NAct) structures refer to a group of remarkably similar structures which prevent external arguments from surfacing syntactically. NAct structures are classified morphologically into two types in many languages: *analytic* (or periphrastic) NAct voice is expressed through a combination of an auxiliary (AUX) and a non-finite element (participle, infinitive, or nonverbal element), as in English, while *synthetic* voice is expressed by a designated NAct morpheme, as in Japanese.

NAct voices can also surface syncretically across languages (e.g., Russian, Greek, Korean, etc.). That is, two or more underlyingly distinct NAct voices are pronounced identically. For instance, in Russian, a single NAct morpheme can be interpreted ambiguously, either as passive or anticausative.

(1) kalitka otkryvalas. (Russian)
gate open.Impf.Pst.NAct
'The gate was being opened (by e.g., Oleg).'
'The gate was opening.' (Oikonomou and Alexiadou, 2022: 25)

Oikonomou and Alexiadou (2022:25), henceforward O&A, make a generalization about voice syncretism in which they state that "voice syncretism is associated with synthetic morphology". They argue that analytic NAct voice, unlike synthetic NAct voice, is associated with a single interpretation. Only synthetic morphology can be interpreted syncretically as passive, middle, or other voices. In their analysis, they take voiceP as a spell-out domain and relate syncretism and non-syncretism to the absence and presence of a designated head above voiceP, respectively. They believe any head that disambiguates voice, being a causative, anticausative, passive head, etc., is outside the spell-out domain of VoiceP. Thus, if a language aims to specify the NAct meaning, it requires additional heads and since these additional heads lie outside VoiceP, they must be spelled out separately, hence; analytic. There are, however, some theoretical and empirical problems with O&A's analysis.

DATA. This generalization, however, is at odds with two related Iranian languages:

(2) a. maya mal-aka-i xæraw kerd. (Kurdish/ active)
maya house-Def-acc destroy do.PST.3rd.SG
'Maya destroyed the house.'

b. mal-ækæ xæraw **bu.** (Kurdish: anticausative/ passive)
house-Def destroy become.Pst.3rd.sg
'The house was destroyed (by itself/ or by e.g., Maya).'

c. ʔæw rext-e **vabi**. (Baxtiari: anticausative/ passive)
water pour-Prtc become.Pst.3rd.sg
'The water was poured (by e.g, Maya). / The water poured (by itself)'

The data in 2b and 2c provide evidence that there is no constraint on combinations of analytic and syncretic forms and any possibility of readings and forms (i.e., synthetic or analytic) are feasible as is shown in table 1: The shaded cells were introduced by O&A.

	Analytic	Synthetic
Non-syncretic	English	Hebrew
syncretic	Kurdish/Baxtiari	Korean

table 1

In light of these languages falsifying the generalization, we can conclude that whether a voice is unspecified or not does not reflect its analytic or synthetic nature. Therefore, both non-/syncretic synthetic and analytic NAct forms should be possible in principle. We argue against the idea that voice heads are phasal. Hence, the head of VoiceP in languages can still be spelled out analytically without any specially designated interpretation. Regardless of the VoiceP's nature, there is nothing that prevents a language from expressing the Voice head as a syncretic analytical construction.