

The Romanian Passive Voice Revisited

Andra VASILESCU
University of Bucharest and Romanian Academy

Currently, Romanian is described as displaying two passive structures: the *be*-passive and the *se*-passive (Graur et.al. 1966, Avram 1997, Dindelegan 2008, Dragomirescu 2013, Zafiu 2012/2015, Stan 2013, Vasilescu 2016, among others). The analysis seems correct, and indicates that Romanian patterns with other Romance languages - which have all inherited the two passive structures from Latin - and typologically differs from English, which has only the *be*-passive, or from the Slavic languages, which have only the *se*-passive.

The two passive options seem to have coexisted in Romanian from the very beginning up to the present, as it is obvious in the oldest preserved texts; also, they were recorded and interpreted in the oldest Romanian grammars (Eustatievici 1757, Cipariu 1877, Tiktin 1893-1895, among others). The relationship between the *se*-passive and the *be*-passive has been described in terms of frequency, register and structure-content correlations partly induced by the discourse genre (Timotin 2000a, 2000b, 2002, Dindelegan 2008).

Nevertheless, the syntactic features of the two structures changed over time (Zafiu 2012/2015, Cornilescu, Nicolae 2014, Vasilescu 2017), while the structures themselves changed their position in the language system. My research explores these changes and interprets them as direct evidence for the following claim: in each stage of its evolution, Romanian displays only one grammaticalized passive structure:

- (i) in Old Romanian, under the strong influence of Slavonic, the passive meaning was conveyed by the grammaticalized *se*-structure, while the *be*-structure functioned as a copula + participle descriptive structure, acquiring a passive reading as a contextual effect of the presuppositions encoded in the participle and its tense-aspectual inherent meaning;
- (ii) in Modern Romanian, the *se*-structure gradually lost some of its combinatory features developing into a structure used to encode a presentative-impersonal/indefinite meaning;
- (iii) The *be*-structure gradually grammaticalized as the expression of the passive meaning after the second half of the 19th century due to the strong influence of translations from the Western Romance languages;
- (iv) In present-day Romanian, the *se*-structure has grammaticalized for the impersonal/indefinite meaning of constructions with both transitive and intransitive verbs, while the *be*-structure is the grammaticalized option for the passive meaning.

This hypothesis is convergent with Rebecca Posner's analysis (1996) and will be documented by historical, structural, functional, and cognitive evidence, as well as by data extracted from several local varieties of spoken Romanian. The analysis of the sub-dialectal corpus shows that *se*-structures display the same features as standard Romanian, but they are less frequently used and limited to specific contextual functions, while the *be*-passive preserves archaic features and is hardly used. In fact, the active voice is preferred in colloquial substandard Romanian, not the passive voice.

If my observations are correct, it seems that the high/low register opposition, induced by influential cultural models, has shaped the history of the Romanian passive, its forms and uses.

The reinterpretation of the two structures calls for the reinterpretation of their constituents (i.e. the patient-subject, the agent by-phrase, the *se* element, and the verb-subject agreement). The hybrid form-function approach I propose relies on Frajzyngier 1978, 1982, Shibatani, 1988, Haspelmath 1990, Klaiman 1991, Fox, Hopper 1995, Sohn 2000, Graumann, Kallmeyer, 2002, Kallmeyer 2002, Reinhart 2002, Blevins 2003, Reinhart, Siloni 2005, Malchukov, Siewierska 2011, among others.

I propose the paper for an oral presentation in the special session on Eastern Romance.

References

- Avram, M., 1997, *Gramatica pentru toți*, București, Humanitas.
- Blevins, J. P., 2003, „Passives and impersonals”, *Journal of Linguistics*, 39 (2003), 473–520.
- Cipariu, T., 1877 / 1992, *Gramatica limbii române. II. Sintetica*. București, Societatea Academică Română / București, Editura Academiei Române.
- Cornilescu, Al., Al. Nicolae, 2014, “The Grammaticalization of a constraint on Passive Reflexive Constructions in Romanian”, în: G. Pană Dindelegan, A. Dragomirescu, I. Nicula, Al. Nicolae, L. Esher (eds.), *Diachronic Variation in Romanian*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars, 309–62.
- Dindelegan, G. , 2008, „Construcții pasive și construcții impersonale”, în: Guțu Romalo (ed.), *Gramatica limbii române*, vol. II, București, Editura Academiei, 133-147.
- Dragomirescu, A. 2013, “The past participle and the participial clause”, în: G. Dindelegan (ed.) 2013a, *The Grammar of Romanian* [GR], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 259–270.
- Eustatievici, D., 1755-1757 / 1969 *Gramatica rumânească*, București.
- Fox, B., P. J. Hopper (eds.), 1995, *Voice: Form and function*. Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Frajzyngier, Z., 1978, “An analysis of be-passives”, *Lingua*, 46, 2 (3), 113–156.
- Frajzyngier, Z., 1982, “Indefinite agent, impersonal, and passive: A functional approach”, *Lingua* 58, 267–290.
- Graumann, C. F., W. Kallmeyer, 2002, *Perspective and perspectivation in discourse*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Gaur, Al., M. Avram, L. Vasiliu (ed.), 1966, *Gramatica limbii române* [GA], București, Editura Academiei.
- Haspelmath, M., 1990, “The grammaticalization of passive morphology”, *Study of Language* 14, 1, 25–72.
- Kallmeyer, W., 2002, „Verbal practices of perspective grounding”, în: C. F. Graumann, W. Kallmeyer, *Perspective and perspectivation in discourse*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2002.
- Klaiman, M. H., 1991, *Grammatical Voice*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Malchukov, A., Siewierska, A. (eds.), 2011, *Impersonal constructions*,. Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Posner, R., 1996, *Romance languages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Reinhart, T., 2002, “The Theta System: an Overview”, *Theoretical Linguistics*, 28, 229–290.
- Reinhart, Tanya, T. Siloni, 2005, The Lexicon-Syntax Parameter: reflexivization and other arity operations *Linguistic Inquiry* 36, 3. 2005, p. 389–436.
- Shibatani, M., 1988, *Passive and voice*, Amsterdam, Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Sohn, J.-S., 2000, *Passivity and Impersonality of the Romance Reflexive Clause*, *Linguistics*, 8, 1, 333–352.
- Stan, C., 2013, *O sintaxă diacronică a limbii române vechi*, București, Editura Universității București.
- Tiktin, H., 1893–1895, *Gramatica română*, I, *Etimologia*, Iași, Editura Șaraga; II, *Sintaxa*, ediția a II-a, București, Tipografia “Nouă”, Grigore Panaitescu.
- Timotin, E., 2000a, „Pasivul românesc în epoca veche. Aplicație asupra textelor originale din secolul al XVI-lea”, *Studii și cercetări lingvistice*, 51, 225–231.
- Timotin, E., 2000b, „Modalități de exprimare a pasivului în dialectele românești sud-dunărene”, *Studii și cercetări lingvistice* 51, 481–490.
- Timotin, E., 2002, „Originea pasivului românesc”, *Studii și cercetări lingvistice*, 53, 95–109.
- Vasilescu, A., 2016, „Passive constructions”, în: G. Dindelegan 2016 (ed.), *The Syntax of Old Romanian*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 188–202.
- Zafiu, R., 2015, „Sintaxa”, în: Gh. Chivu, G. Dindelegan, A. Dragomirescu, I. Nedelcu, I. Nicula (eds.), *Studii de istorie a limbii române. Morfosintaxa limbii literare în secolul al XIX-lea și al XX-lea*, București, Editura Academiei, 322–323.