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Passive Voice Constructions in Modern Irish[1]

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Abstract

This paper is about the passive construction, of which modern Irish (a VSO language) has two primary forms, the personal passive and its variants, and the impersonal. An empirical question is posed as to whether a third passive form exists within the language, that of a functionally defined GET-passive. To deliver a unified analysis of the various passive constructions, a perspective that takes account of the complete event is necessary.

Irish supports three variants of the personal passive construction (i.e. perfective, progressive, prospective) each of which involves the substantive verb in a periphrastic form. The agent can optionally be represented obliquely. The active verb takes a non-finite form as a verbal adjective or verbal noun, depending on the personal passive variant. We note that a number of other voice constructions, specifically the reflexive and middle voice, appear to have some qualities in common with the personal passive.

The impersonal passive form occurs with all verbs of Irish, across all tenses, whether intransitive or transitive. The impersonal passive form is also to be found productively with the substantive verb across all tenses. It does not under any circumstances occur with the copula verb. Our view is that the impersonal passive construction has an indefinite actor at the level of the semantics and that the impersonal passive verb expresses this as a third person indefinite pronoun in the syntax via a synthetic post-verbal suffix rendered on the matrix verb. When considered in this way, the behaviour of the impersonal passive verb in the syntax is shown to be the same with respect to definite subject pronouns when they are expressed in a non-analytic manner, that is, in the synthetic form of the verb. The analysis here supports the view that there is strong link, reinforced by immediate proximity, between the verb and subject underpinning the VSO linear word order.

We investigate whether there is a third passive construction to be found in Irish, a GET passive. The GET passive is attested in many, but not all, of the world's languages (Siewierska (1984). We find evidence that a particular subset of constructions precisely exhibits the characteristics of the GET passive under strictly defined constraints. On the basis of this evidence, we claim that there is a functionally defined GET passive in modern Irish.

The commonality underpinning the passive constructions, including the functionally defined GET passive, can be explained in terms of the windowing of attention analysis in the sense of Talmy (1996), that is, a functional analysis with an event frame perspective sensitive to prototypicality. Irish follows a VSO word order with the subject more closely bound to the verb than the object. As well as looking at each of the passive constructions, we also briefly examine how the VSO word order is maintained through each.

1. Introduction

This paper is about the passive construction, of which Irish has two primary forms, the personal passive and its variants, and the impersonal. An empirical question is posed

[1] This paper was presented at the High Desert Linguistics Society Conference at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA in March 2001

as to whether a third passive form exists within the language, that of a functionally defined GET-passive.

The hypothesis in this paper is that the commonality underlying each of the passive constructions casts a different component of the event frame into the foreground, in the sense of a "windowing of attention" (Talmy 1996a).

Irish is a VSO language and therefore, in common with the other Celtic languages, the order of elements in the structure of transitive sentences is verb-subject-object.

The functional approach in this paper makes use of many of the insights of Role and Reference Grammar (RRG). In the Role and Reference framework (Van Valin 1993, Van Valin & LaPolla 1997), the semantic representation of sentences is based on the lexical representation of the verb. RRG employs a decompositional representation based on the theory of Aktionsart of Vendler (1967) and directly builds upon Dowty (1979, 1986, 1989, and 1991). The lexical representation of a verb or other predicate is its logical structure.

The semantic representation of an argument is a function of its position in the logical structure of the predicate and the RRG linking system refers to an element's logical structure position. RRG posits two generalised semantic roles, or in Van Valin's terminology, "semantic macroroles", which play a central role in the linking system. The macroroles are actor and undergoer, and they encapsulate the usually accepted clusters of thematic roles. They are the primary arguments of a transitive predication. In an intransitive predicate, the single argument can be either an actor or an undergoer, depending on the semantic properties of the predicate.

The relationship between the logical structure argument positions and macroroles is captured by the Actor-Undergoer Hierarchy (AUH). In this, the leftmost argument in terms of the hierarchy will be the actor and the rightmost argument will be the undergoer. Transitivity in RRG is therefore defined semantically in terms of the number of macroroles of a predicate.

The linking between semantics and syntax has two phases. The first phase consists of the determination of semantic macroroles based on the logical structure of the verb (or other predicate) in the clause. The second phase is concerned with the mapping of the macroroles and other arguments into the syntactic functions.

2. The Personal Passive

The language supports three variants of the personal passive construction, each of which involves the substantive verb in a periphrastic form. These relate to the nature of the aspect and are, accordingly: the progressive, the prospective and the perfective (Ó'Siadháil 1989:294, Stenson 1981:145*ff*, Russell 1995:100*ff*)).

They are passives (i.e. personal, not impersonal, passives) in the sense that a noun phrase, which does not represent the agent, appears as the subject of the substantive verb in the first argument slot following the substantive verb in the position reserved for the grammatical subject. The agent can optionally be represented obliquely by a prepositional phrase introduced by the preposition *ag* 'at' or *ó* 'from' and containing the nominal denoting the agent.

We can distinguish between three different, but related forms, of the personal passive by reference to the following schemata. The specific prepositions in each of the schema are a necessary part of the constructions.

Personal Passive[2]

(1) Perfective Passive [SUBV $NP_{\textbf{undergoer}}$ VA (+ $ag_{\textbf{PP}}$ $NP_{\textbf{actor}}$) …]

(2) a: Progressive Passive [SUBV $NP_{\textbf{undergoer}}$ (*dh*)$á_{\textbf{PP}}$ + $ADJ_{\textbf{possessive}}$ VN (+ $ag_{\textbf{PP}}$ $NP_{\textbf{actor}}$) …]

or

b: Progressive Passive [SUBV $NP_{\textbf{undergoer}}$ $i_{\textbf{PP}}$ $ADJ_{\textbf{possessive}}$ VN …]

(3) a: Prospective Passive [SUBV $NP_{\textbf{undergoer}}$ $le_{\textbf{PP}}$ VN (+ $ag_{\textbf{pp}}$ $NP_{\textbf{actor}}$) ….]

or

[2] Legend:

SUBV:	Substantive verb	VN:	Verbal Noun
VA:	Verbal Adjective	PP:	Preposition

b: Prospective Passive [SUBV $NP_{undergoer}$ do_{PP} +*a*:$PN_{possessive}$ VN (+ ag_{PP} NP_{actor}) …]

The personal passive construction reframes the event with a focus on the resulting state or the condition of the undergoer participant, depending on the particular variant of the personal passive. This state may be static if the action is completed, as in a perfective passive, or dynamic, as in a passive progressive construction. Each of these potential situations is reflected in the choice of the passive construction template employed. This process of reframing the event to focus on a resulting state or undergoer involves the use of a BE verb, that is, the substantive verb (but never the copula). It also involves the use of less finite verb form, i.e. a verbal adjective or verbal noun, the removal of the actor participant, or the demotion of the actor participant to an oblique position in the syntax. In the personal passive construction, the actor is subject to demotion or suppression while the undergoer carries the stative-resultative aspects of the event in focus. As we will see from our examples, the personal passive is usually not agent deleting but is agent demoting.

We now examine the variants of the personal passive constructions, starting with the perfective variant of the personal passive, and following this, with the progressive and prospective variant constructions respectively.

2.1 Perfective Variant of the Personal Passive

(4) *Tá an leabhar leite agam.*
Be:SUBV-PRES the:DET book:N read:VA at:PP+me:PN
LIT:'Be the book read at me'.
The book is read by me**.**
[**BE'**(**leigh'**(0, an leabhar), **ag'**(mé))]

The agentive phrase is optional and the construction may equally well be expressed without any mention of the agent (5).

(5) *Tá an leabhar leite.*
Be:SUBV-PRES the:DET book:N read:VA
LIT:'Be the book read'.
The book is read.
[**BE'**(**leigh'**(0, an leabhar))]

2.2 Progressive Variant of the Personal Passive

2.2.1 The (A) Template Form of the Progressive Passive Construction

(6) *Tá an doras dhá phéinteáil agam.*

Be:SUBV-PRES the:DET door:N to:PP+its:POSS-ADJ painting:VN by:PP+me:PN

LIT:'The door is to its painting by me'.

The door is being painted by me.

[**do'**(0, [**BE'**(**dhá'**(**péinteáil'**(0, an doras), ag'(mé)))])]

(7) *Bhí hataí agus miotógaí dhá scabadh fríd an aer.*[3]

The hats and belongings were being scattered through the air.

Bhí hataí agus miotógaí dhá scabadh

Be:SUBV-PRES hats:N and:CONJ belongings:N to:PP+for:PP scattering:VN

fríd an aer

through:ADV the:DET air:N

[**frid an aer**'([**do'**(0, [**BE'**(**dhá'**(**scabaigh'**(0, hataí agus miotógaí)))])])]

(8) *Bhí an gloine á bhriseadh.*

Be:SUBV-PAST the:DET glass:NP to:PP+for:PP breaking:VN

LIT:'The glass was to-its breaking'.

The glass was being broken.

[**do'**(0, [**BE'**(**á'**(**bris'**(0, an gloine)))])]

(9) *Bhí an liúdar á rúscadh agus na bádaí gann.*

Be:SUBV the:DET coal-fish:N for:PP stirring:VN and:CONJ the:DET boats:N scarce:N

LIT:'The coal-fish were for stirring and the boats were scarce'.

The coal-fish were being stirred but the boats were scarce.

[**do'**(0, [**BE'**(**á'**(**rúscaigh'**(0, an liúdar))) & (**gann'**(na bádaí)])]

2.2.2 The (B) Template Form of the Progressive Passive Construction

The constructions below follow the (**b**) schema and involve the possessive adjective. In these examples the undergoer of the action is affected and this participant appears

[3] As a convenience to the reader, where the gloss of the data example runs over a line we will state the sentence under discussion in standalone format at the beginning of the example.

in position next after the substantive verb with the activity denoted in a non-finite form as a verbal noun.

These examples are passive and progressive (Ó'Siadháil 1989:295), reflecting an ongoing dynamic state. The verbs, here expressed in the non-finite verbal noun form, are a special class of passive form of stative verbs which refocus the view on the state in a certain way. Crucially, in these examples, the actor is the initiator of the action and is the subject. The same participant, however, is also in the *state of undergoing the action* denoted by the verb in verbal noun form. There is no demotion or promotion.

(10) Schema Template for first person singular participant:
Tá mé$_1$ i mo$_1$ ***VN***.
LIT: 'I am in my VN-ing'.
I am VN-ing.
[**BE'**(mé, (**i**'(**mo'**(VN))))]

(11) *Tá mé i mo chodladh.*
Be:SUBV-PRES me:PN in:PP my:POSS-ADJ sleeping:VN
LIT: 'I am in my sleeping'.
I am sleeping.
[**BE'**(mé, (**i**'(**mo'**(chodladh))))]

(12) *Tá mé i mo chónaí.*
Be:SUBV-PRES me:PN in:PP my:POSS-ADJ living:VN
LIT: 'I am in my living'.
I am living.
[**BE'**(mé, (**i**'(**mo'**(chónaí))))]

Common to each of these examples is the utilisation of the substantive verb followed by the clause subject, followed in turn by the preposition *i* 'in' and a possessive adjective coindexed to the subject, followed immediately by the verbal noun. No oblique actor is specified, or can be specified, because of the nature of the construction.

2.3 Prospective Variant of the Personal Passive

Constructions in the prospective variant of the personal passive are classified as imperfective as they do not denote an action that has finished. Instead, the action has not yet taken place but is expected to occur at some future time.

2.3.1 Active Prospective Clause

(13) *Tá mé le leamh an leabhair.*
Be:SUBV me:PN with:PP reading:VN the:DET book:N
I am to read the book.
[**BE'**(**le'**(**léigh'** (mé, an leabhar))]

2.3.2 Passive Prospective Clause

(14) Tá an leabhair le leamh agam.
Be:SUBV the:DET book:N with:PP reading:VN at:PP+me:PN
LIT:'Be the book to read at me'.
The book is to be read by me.
[**BE'**(**le'**(**léigh'**(0, an leabhar)), (**ag'**(mé)))]

(15) *Tá anál an tsaoil seo le mothú ag éinne ar leacacha an bhaile*.
LIT:'The breadth of this life is to be felt by anyone on the pavingstones of the town'.
The breadth of life is to be felt by anyone on the town streets.
Tá anál an tsaoil seo le mothú ag éinne
Be:SUBV-PRES breadth:N the:DET life:N this:DET with:PP feeling:VN at:PP anyone:N
ar leacacha an bhaile
on:PP flagstones:N the:DET town:N
[**ar leacacha an bhaile'**([**BE'**(**le'**(**mothaigh'**(0, anál an tsaoil seo))), (**ag'**(éinne))])]

2.4 Personal Passive Summary

In the personal passive constructions of modern Irish, the actor is backgrounded by demotion down to an oblique position within a prepositional phrase introduced by *ag* 'at/by', or deleted. The next candidate participant in the logical structure to become the grammatical subject in the syntax is the undergoer. This gives the appearance that the object of the active verb is promoted up to become the subject of substantive verb in the personal passive construction irrespective of variant. This is, however, a side

effect of the defocusing (in the sense of Shibatani 1985) of the actor of the active clause in the passive voice construction.

A number of other voice constructions, specifically the reflexive, middle, and reciprocal (Nolan 2001) appear to have qualities in common with the personal passive. Described in terms of promotion and demotion, they all appear to "promote" or "upgrade" the grammatical object to subject status in some way and may even indicate a structural similarity between subject and object.

We now examine the impersonal passive construction.

3. The Impersonal Passive

3.1 The Impersonal Passive Construction

The impersonal passive verb form occurs with all verbs of Irish, across all tenses, whether intransitive or transitive, The impersonal passive form is also to be found productively with the substantive verb across all tenses. It does not under any circumstances occur with the copula verb. The impersonal passive form can be followed by a prepositional phrase, but only one that is introduced by *le* 'by/with' or *ó* 'from'.

In (16), the matrix verb is in the impersonal passive form. No subject is expressed in the clause. A grammatical object is expressed in the form of a third person pronoun, marked with accusative case. The marker *féin* is post adjacent to the grammatical object of the sentence giving an emphatic interpretation. Emphatic use of *féin* with a grammatical object is sanctioned, as simple proximity to the object entity is all that is required. This example illustrates the use of *féin* with an impersonal passive construction but deployed in an emphatic mode only, and not reflexively.

(16) *Tugadh é féin chun na modh-scoile i mBaile Átha Cliath ina dhiaidh sin.*
LIT: '(Someone) brought him (self) to the model school in Dublin after that'.
He himself came to the model school in Dublin after that.
Tugadh é féin chun na modh-scoile.
Came:V- IMPERS-PASS-PAST he:PN self:PART to:PP the:DET model-school:N

i mBaile Átha Cliath ina dhiaidh sin
in:PP Dublin:N in:PP after:ADV that:DET
[**cun'**(na modh-scoile$_3$, [**i'**(BAC$_4$, [**ina'**(diadh sin, [**do'**[x$_1$, [**tugadh'**(x$_1$, [**é$_2$**'(féin$_2$)])]])])])]
Where : **x$_1$** is an animate and human entity,
and BAC is used as an abbreviation for Baile Átha Cliath.

Example (17) has a construction that, at first glance, appears unusual in that it contains two conjoined clauses, both with the impersonal passive form of their respective verbs.

In addition, the first clause has apparently two arguments and the marker *féin* associated with the second of these in post adjacent position. The second clause has only one argument, the clausal object.

A contributor to the complexity of this sentence is these two arguments in the first clause, which look like subject and object. This cannot be, as the clause verb is in the impersonal passive form and cannot "promote" the object to subject position, in the sense of Givón (1984, 1990).

(17) *Tréigeadh an seanteampall é féin agus fágadh ina bhallóig é.*
LIT: '(Someone) deserted the old church itself and (someone) left it in ruins'.
The old church itself was deserted and left in ruins.
Tréigeadh ***an seanteampall é féin***
(Someone) deserted:V- IMPERS-PASS-PAST the:DET old:ADJ+church:N it:PN self:PART
agus fágadh ina bhallóig é.
and:CONJ (someone) left: V-IMP-PER-PAST in:PP ruin:N it:PN
[**do'**(x$_1$, [**tréig'**(x$_1$, [**an seanteampall$_2$'(é$_2$**'(féin$_2$))])])] &
[**do'**(x$_1$, **fág'**(x$_1$, [é$_2$, [**in'**[**a'$_2$**(ballóig)]]]))]
Where **x** is an animate and human entity, but unknown or irrelevant to the context.

The verb in the first clause has two participants. The first participant is indefinite and specific, but human and animate. The second participant is specific but non-human and inanimate. The problem lies with a potential ambiguity in the clause, which is only removed by the insertion of *é féin*. A speaker uttering *Tréigeadh an seanteampall*

féin … would be ambiguous between these two readings: 1) 'The old church itself was abandoned … ' and 2) 'Even the old church was abandoned … '.

To disambiguate the meaning to the intended first reading it is necessary to replace *féin* with ***é*** *féin* in the clause, hence the strangeness. The additional "argument" is a dummy and does not take an argument position or increase the valency in any way. The marker *féin* is used emphatically in this sentence and not reflexively. In the first clause, there is no visible human subject to act as reflexive antecedent, as the construction is an impersonal passive with no actor in the syntax.

All Irish verbs except the copula have an impersonal passive form. With the impersonal passive form of a verb, no specific definite actor is elaborated in logical structure. The actor is instead specific but indefinite. The actor remains specific because we are committed to their actual existance, but is indefinite to the degree that there is no subject available in argument structure. The *type* or *kind* of this specific indefinite actor is animate, usually human.

3.1.1 Impersonal Construction with an Actor Coded Obliquely

The examples here provide evidence that the actor may be deployed obliquely in impersonal passive constructions. This appears to be a recent phenomenon in the language.

The example in (18) of the impersonal passive does not have an actor expressed in subject position and the verb stem has the appropriate impersonal ending. The inanimate and non-human undergoer of the sentence appears as the grammatical object. This example is interesting for two reasons. The first is that it deploys the phrase *le chéile* 'together' that is normally used as a trigger for reciprocity (Nolan 2001). Use of the marker phrase *le chéile* 'together' is not reciprocal here as no actors are expressed in subject position. The second reason is that the clause, while impersonal, has an actor coded obliquely via a prepositional phrase introduced by *ag* 'at/by'. The actor that is obliquely expressed is not plural, having singular number. The phrase *le chéile* in this example simply denotes manner in relation to the verbal

action. Because English does not have an impersonal passive, the gloss does not quite capture the sense of the sentence. This is better expressed in the literal gloss.

(18) *Cuireadh an tuarascáil parlaiminte le chéile ag Astrid Thors MEP; ball de phobal na Suailainnise san Fhionlainn*.

LIT: '(Someone) put the parliamentary report together by Astrid Thors MEP; a member of the Swedish people in Finland'.

The parliamentary report was put together by Astrid Thors MEP; a member of the Swedish community in Finland.

Cuireadh *an* *tuarascáil parlaiminte le* *chéile* *ag*
Put:V-IMPERS-PASS-PAST the:DET report:N parliament:N with:PP together:PART by:PP
Astrid Thors *MEP;*
Astrid Thors:N MEP:N
ball *de* *phobal* *na* *Suailainnise san* *Fhionlainn*
member:N of:PP people:N the:DET Swedish:N in:PP+the:DET Finland:N

[**do'**(x_1, [**cuir'**(x_1, (**le chéile'**(an tuarascáil parlaiminte**,** (**ag'**(Astrid Thors MEP_1)))))])]

Where : $\mathbf{x_1}$ is an animate and human entity. In this instance, it is the entity expressed obliquely in the prepositional phrase phrase, Astrid Thors MEP.

In example (19), we demonstrate another example of an oblique actor recorded within an impersonal passive construction. The impersonal matrix verb and the verbal noun in this example re both instances of different forms of the same verb coexisting in the same sentence and delivering different functions. No subject is syntactically expressed in the sentence, as to be expected. The grammatical object is inanimate and non-human, being the quantity of money to be allocated. This object of the impersonal passive is the subject of the verbal noun appearing to the left of the verbal noun phrase. The verbal noun is immediately followed by the prepositional pronoun *acu* 'by them', marked for accusative third person plural. This is co-referential in the logical structure with the specific indefinite human animate actor denoted by $\mathbf{x_1}$. This specific indefinite human animate actor is not overtly expressed as grammatical subject in the syntax.

(19) *Caithfear 1.39 milliún Euro (£1.2 milliún) á caitheamh acu ar chúrsaí Bascaise do mhúinteoirí scoile*.

LIT:'(someone) will throw 1.39 million Euro (£1.2 million) for spending by them on Basque classes for school teachers'.

1.39 million Euro (£1.2 million) will be allocated for spending by them on Basque classes for school teachers.

Caithfear *1.39 milliún Euro (£1.2 milliún)*

Throw:V-IMPERS-PASS-FUT 1.39 million Euro (£1.2 million):NP

á *caitheamh* *acu* *ar* *chúrsaí* *Bascaise*

to:PP+for:PP spending:VN by:PP+them:PN on:PP classes:N Basque:N

do *mhúinteoirí scoile*.

to:PP teachers:N school:N

[**ar'**(chúrsaí Bascaise'**(do'**(mhúinteoirí scoile,

[**do'**(x_1, [**caith'**(x_1, (**á'(caith'**(1.39 milliún Euro**,** (**ag'**($siad_1$))))))])]))]

Where : $\mathbf{x_1}$ is an animate and human entity.

3.2 Discussion on the Impersonal Passive

What is common to the impersonal passive constructions in this section is that the actor is backgrounded to the extent that it becomes indefinite, and not, in any way, in focus. The *type* or *kind* of the actor is available as animate, usually human. Crucially, the actor must be specific while indefinite for quite particular reasons. Semantically, the impersonal construction is transitive with two participants recorded in the logical structure, an actor and undergoer. The actor is, however, an "impersonal agent". The clause is syntactically intransitive in that only one argument is expressed in the syntax, that of the undergoer which links to grammatical object. The actor is unexpressed and consequently there is no overt subject in the syntax. However, as the object stays in the same position and maintains object marking, the situation that holds at the level of the semantics must be visible to the syntax. Specifically, the object is not "promoted" to subject in this construction and the unexpressed actor is noted in the syntax by the device of marking by a suffix on the matrix verb. The behaviour of the clause object is very evident when the nominal is a pronoun.

Haspelmath (1997) has recently examined indefinite pronouns across a substantial number of the world's languages, over nine different functional domains. These domains are: specific known, specific unknown, irrealis non-specific, question, conditional, indirect negation, comparative, direct choice and free choice. He finds that in most languages several indefinite pronouns overlap in their distribution, that is, some functions may be expressed by several different indefinite pronouns.

For Irish, Haspelmath (1997:278) identifies an inventory of three series of indefinite pronouns, all of which are derived from generic nouns. The series consists of 1) the non-emphatic *éigin* 'some' series, 2) the negative-polarity series marked by *aon* 'any', and 3) the emphatic *ar bith* 'at all' series. An example of an active clause with specific known/unknown is:

(20) *Dúirt* *duine éigin* *liom* *é.*
Told:V-PAST person:N some:PN with:PP+me:PN it:PN
Somebody told it to me.
[**do'**(duine éigin, (**dúirt'**(duine éigin, (**le'**(mé, é)))))]

The impersonal passive equivalent of the above clause, with exactly the same meaning, is:

(21) *Dúradh* *liom* *é.*
Told:V -IMPERS-PASS- PAST with:PP+me:PN it:PN
Somebody told it to me.
[**do'**(x, (**dúirt'**(x, (**le'**(mé, é)))))]

This evidence suggests that the impersonal passive, with the conflated specific indefinite subject, is an extension of the cline within the functional domains. The agentive indefinite actor and syntactic subject of the active clause in (20) is made more indefinite in the impersonal passive (21) by the backgrounding to the extent that it is no longer explicitly expressed in the syntax of the impersonal passive. We still have a commitment to the actual and real existence of the actor that is now expressed at the semantic level only, in logical structure, and, because of this, it is specific but indefinite. The indefiniteness hierarchy may therefore be:

(22) *sé/sí/siad* 'he/she/them' ___ *duine* 'person' ___ *aon* 'any' ___ **Impersonal passive**
with conflated specific indefinite subject

Within these examples, the actor is backgrounded in the semantics of logical structure but still visible to the syntax as a conflated subject morphologicaly recorded on the verb. The evidence for this is that the object does not, and cannot, occupy the grammatical subject position in these constructions. The subject that is conflated is

specific and indefinite, animate and human. Because this participant is specific but indefinite, the behaviour is very similar to that of normal pronouns when expressed in synthetic forms of the verb, for instance, the third person pronoun with these human attributes.

We argue that the behaviour of the impersonal passive is in line with synthetic verb type behaviours, i.e. 1st person singular and 1st person plural, and others, across the tenses. Irish commonly exhibits this mix of synthethic and analytic usages, but to a greater or lesser degree depending on the region or locality (O Siadháil 1989, Stenson 1987). The impersonal passive behaviour is motivated by the use of the device of conflated subject as a means of backgrounding, but not fully deleting, the actor, and of highlighting the action of the verb itself.

We have however attested several examples above where an oblique agent is expressed at the end of the clause in the same position as the oblique agent of a personal passive passive. This appears to only occur in more recent usages of speech and may be indicative of a change in the underlying template on which the impersonal passive is constructed.

4. Impersonal passive of the Substantive Verb

4.1 The Substantive Verb

Irish has two forms of the verb 'to be', the copula *is* 'be' and the substantive verb *tá* 'to be'. The substantive verb can take a conjugation across all the tenses. For each of those tenses it also has an impersonal passive form. The substantive verb therefore fully supports the impersonal passive construction.

All substantive verb constructions therefore have a corresponding impersonal passive construction. This means that a speaker may choose to utilise the active form of a matrix verb, or may instead utilise a substantive verb construction for the personal passive with any of the three variants discussed earlier in the first section of this paper. It also means that personal passive forms using the substantive may also directly take the impersonal passive form of the substantive construction.

4.2 The Impersonal Passive Form of A Substantive Verb

An impersonal passive form of a substantive verb in a construction that is imperfective is illustrated in example (23). The state-of-affairs denoted by the clause is that of a progressing ongoing activity. The actor of the construction is backgrounded and does not appear anywhere in the syntax. The denoted action is represented by the verbal noun *obair* 'working', and this is fronted by the preposition *ag* 'at'. No verb undergoer is expressed and therefore no clause object is available to the syntax. The verb *obair* 'work' can also be deployed with the impersonal passive form of the verb *obair* itself, or in any of the variants of the personal passive.

(23) *Bítear ag obair.*
Be:SUBV-IMPER-PASS-HAB-PRES at:PP working:VN
LIT:'(Someone) was working'.
People were working.
[**do'**(x, [**BE'**(**ag'**(**obair'**(x)))])] where **x** is unspecified.

The example in (24) illustrates the impersonal passive form of the substantive verb, with a verbal noun form of a transitive verb denoting a progressing unbounded activity. No actor is expressed. The undergoer is expressed as the direct object of the verbal noun, that is, the direct object of the construction.

(24) *Bítear ag bhriseadh an gloine*
Be:SUBV-IMP-PASS-HAB-PRES at:PP breaking:VN the:DET glass:N
LIT:'(Someone) was breaking the glass'.
People were breaking the glass.
[**do'**(x, [**BE'**(**ag'**(**bris**(x, an gloine)))])] where **x** is unspecified.

The example in (25) contains three clauses of which the first utilises the impersonal passive form of the substantive verb. Like the previous example, there is no syntactic argument in subject position as, by definition, the verb is in the impersonal passive form. This particular clause also contains a verbal noun fronted by *á* 'to+for', usually deployed within the prospective passive variant of the personal passive. This clause is therefore an impersonal passive version of the progressive variant of the personal

passive. The second clause contains a substantive verb and denotes the state of *a mac ar dhuine den fhuirinn* 'her son is a member of the crew'. The action of the first clause is concerned with the state denoted in the second clause.

(25) *Bhítear á aidhbhsiughadh díthe go rabh a mac ar dhuine den fhuirinn agus go rabh sé báithte*.

LIT:'Someone was emphasising to her that her son was on person of the crew and that he was drowned'.

Someone was emphasising to her that her son was a member of the crew and that he was drowned.

Bhítear á aidhbhsiughadh díthe
Be:SUBV-IMPERS-PASS-HAB-PRES to:PP+for:PP emphasising:VN to:PP+her:PN
go rabh a mac ar dhuine den fhuirinn
to:PP be:SUBV-PRES her:POSS-ADJ son:N on:PP person:N of:PP+the:DET crew
agus go rabh sé báithte.
and:CONJ to:PP be:SUBV-PRES he:PN drowned:VA

[**do'**($í_1$, ([**BE'**(x_2, (**á'**(**aidhbhsiugh'**(x_2)))] &
[**BE'**(a_1'(mac_3), (ar'(duinne, (de'(an fhuirinn)))))] &
[**BE'**(**báigh'**($sé_3$))]

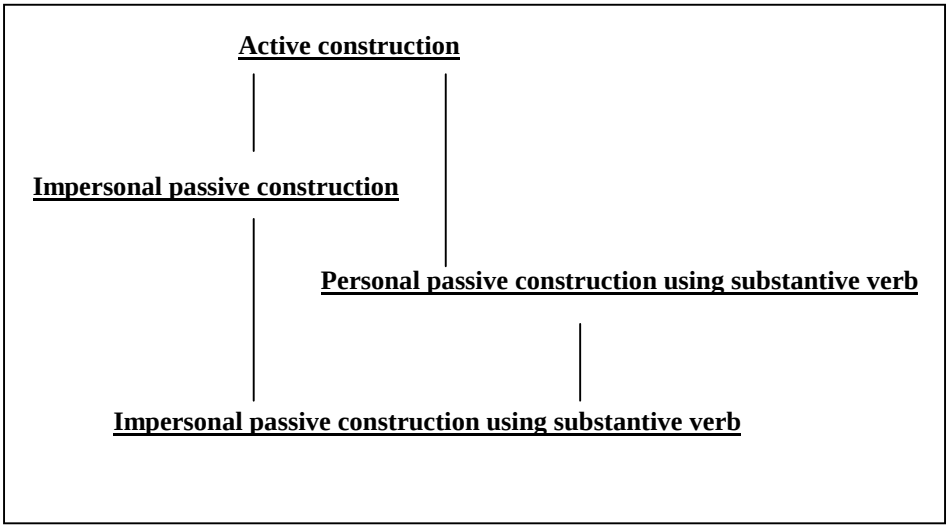
The third clause also contains a substantive verb and denotes the state of the son as *báithte* 'drowned'. The subject of this clause is *sé* 'he' and the state is recorded on the subject via a verbal adjective. This construction is therefore a typical example of a perfective variant of the personal passive. Its function is to describe the resultant state that holds after the action of the first two clauses in the construction.

We therefore have in the totality of this example an impersonal passive version of a progressive variant of the personal passive, followed by a substantive verb clause denoting a state-of-affairs of state and followed in turn by a substantive verb clause that employs the perfective variant of the personal passive.

4.3 Summary of the Impersonal Passive of the Substantive Verb

The availability of the impersonal passive of the substantive verb means that a speaker has a considerable number of strategies that can be deployed as the situation demands. We diagram this map of possibilities in (26).

(26)



5. The GET Passive

5.1 Background

This section investigates whether there is a third passive construction to be found in Irish, that is, a GET passive. The GET passive is attested in many, but not all, of the world's languages (Siewierska (1984).

From the literature, the defining characteristics of the GET passive include the following, which may be used as diagnostics to test for its discovery:

(27) **GET Passive Characteristics**[4]

a. GET passives are "*normally used in constructions without an agent*" (Leech & Svartvik, 1994: 330).
b. GET passives place "*the emphasis on the subject rather than the agent, and on what happens to the subject as a result of the event*" (Quirk et al., 1985:161).
c. GET passives emphasise the subject referent's condition, which is "*usually an unfavourable condition*" (Quirk et al., 1985: 161).
d. GET passives "*describe events that are perceived to have either fortunate or unfortunate consequences for the subject*" (Siewierska 1984:135).
e. The GET passive is likely to have a human subject that is non-agentive, affected and involved, (Givón 1993:119*ff*).

[4] Note: The underline in the quotations are mine in order to bring out certain points for discussion.

f. The GET passive is more likely to be inchoative and punctual, that is, INGR rather then BECOME (Arce-Arenales, Axelrod and Fox.(1993:11*ff*).

g. A GET passive may have an agentive phrase in an oblique position, similar to a BE passive (Arce-Arenales, Axelrod and Fox. 1993:11*ff*).

5.2 The Verb Faigh

Irish has a verb *faigh* 'get' that is a candidate for this construction in some of it usages. To determine whether it meets the required diagnostic characteristics, we need to look at its deployment over a number of GET constructions. The verb *faigh* has a different morphological shape over the tenses and for simplicity, we will use *faigh* to refer to these in a general way. The verb *faigh* has an impersonal passive form for each tense, a non-finite verbal noun and verbal adjective form. As well as having an impersonal passive form, the verb *faigh* can undergo each variant of the personal passive.

The verb *faigh* is transitive, taking two participants, an actor and undergoer. There is a quality about this verb in transitive usages under certain conditions that is particularly interesting. This is when the first participant is not an actor, but an undergoer, and the second participant is a nominal that represents a state. The action of the verb records, then, the fact of the first participant undergoing the state change identified by the nominal in the second participant position.

Even thought *faigh* constructions are transitive, there is a qualitative difference between the construction *fuair*$_{\mathbf{GET}}$ [X NP$_{\mathbf{entity}}$] and the construction *fuair* $_{\mathbf{GET}}$ [X NP$_{\mathbf{state}}$]. The second construction codes a state as a nominal, rather than as a verbal adjective as found in the perfective personal passive. The substantive verb is not employed.

The argument linked to subject position is that of the undergoer and not actor. The fact that the undergoer is coded in subject position reinforces the non-volitional and non-control attributes of the participant. No actor is coded. Indeed no actor coding in subject position is possible with this second construction in transitive form.

The construction is transitive with the undergoer coded as subject, and the state that affects the undergoer is strongly marked as a full nominal in clause object position. The relative coding of these arguments in the construction follows the animacy hierarchy with the human and animate participant coded first as subject and the non-human and inanimate entity coded next as object. The focus of the event is on the resultant state that the undergoer will be in after the event.

Syntactically, the construction is transitive as can be seen from (29) and (30). Schematically the construction differs regarding the role of the participant that takes subject position in the syntax. In example (28) below, the **x** participant is expected to be the undergoer that receives the state change denoted by the second participant, the theme. The undergoer must be human and animate. The situation type is that of an achievement.

(28) *Fuair* ***x*** *bás.*
Got:V-PAST x:N death:N
LIT: '**x** got death'.
x got killed.
[(¬ (**bás'**(x)) & [**do'**(0, (**fuair'**(0, **bás'**(x)))) & **INGR** [**BE'**(x, bás)]]]

The above example may be compared to (29) where the **y** participant merely receives simple possession of the entity denoted by the second participant, the theme. No state change takes place in relation to the first participant. The first participant need not be human or animate in this version of the construction. The clause typically codes for an accomplishment situation type.

(29) *Fuair* ***y*** *an* *úl.*
Got:V-PAST y:N the:DET apple:N
y got the apple.
[**do'**(0, **fuair'**(0, an úl) & **BE'**(**at'**(y), an úl)

The situation types underlying the transitive clause are those of accomplishment (BECOME) or achievement (INGR), depending on whether the state change was instantaneous or gradual. This is reflected by either BECOME or INGR in the logical

structure representations, along with possession of resulting state and the major state change on the undergoer actually affected by action of the verb, such that undergoer undergoes the state changes denoted in the second NP from the verb. Therefore, the first participant NP is not an actor but an undergoer, and the second participant NP is neither actor or undergoer but that of OTHER. Irish codes possession by use of the preposition *ag* 'at/by', as against ownership with *le* 'with' and we will see this reflected in the logical structure representations of these constructions.

In first example above in (28), **x** must prototypically be human and animate but, non-protypically, must be animate at the minimum. The NP *bás* 'death' is an nominal, from the verb *básigh* 'die', denoting the most prototypical state change that a human can undergo, that is, from animate to inanimate.

5.3 Get Constructions That Demonstrate the State Change

5.3.1 State Is Beneficial for Undergoer

Example (30) illustrates this phenomenon and encodes the beneficial state change. The clause is transitive with two participants. The first participant is human and animate and the undergoer of the action, not the actor. The second participant codes the state change that the first participant will undergo. After the event has taken place, the first participant will be transformed in a major way and will have, as a characteristic, the state denoted by the second participant. The state change will not be simple possession. What is important is the affectedness of the undergoer as a consequence of the event. The affectedness is beneficial to the undergoer in this particular example.

(30) *Fuair sé léigheas ar sin.*
Got:V-PAST he:PN healing/medicine:N on:PP that:DET
He got healed of that.
[[NOT [**BE'**(sé, léigheas)]] &
[**ar'**(sin, [**do'**(0, [**fuair'**(sé, léigheas)])])] & CAUSE BECOME [**BE'**(sé, léigheas)]]

The example in (31) is transitive with an undergoer participant as the clause subject. The object of the clause is complex with two conjoined nominals. A determiner with

universal logical scope, *uile* ‘every’, ranges over the plural subjects, such that each member of the set of undergoers is affected by both of the states denoted in the complex sentence object. The affectedness represented by both states is beneficial to all of the undergoers.

(31) *Fuair an uile dhuine a chroí agus a aigneadh ar an tsliabh*.
Every person found their heart and their character on the mountain.
Fuair an uile dhuine a chroí
Got:V-PAST the:DET every:DET person:N their:POSS-ADJ heart:N
agus a aigneadh ar an tsliabh.
and:CONJ their:POSS-ADJ disposition:N on:PP the:DET mountain:N
[[NOT [**BE’**(an uile dhuine, a chroí agus a aigneadh)]] &
[**ar an tsliabh’**[**do’**(0, [**fuair’**(an uile dhuine, a chroí agus a aigneadh)])]] &
CAUSE BECOME [**BE’**(an uile dhuine, a chroí agus a aigneadh)]]

5.3.2 State Has Negative Consequences For Undergoer

The affectedness in example (32) is <u>detrimental</u> to the welfare of the undergoer. The example in (32) is complex and contains two clauses. The <u>first clause</u> has a negative form on the verb *faigh* and shows that this phemomena is visible in this circumstance. An adverbial of time, with scope over the clause, gives the extent in time of the event. The <u>second clause</u> contains a substantive verb and a verbal noun fronted by the preposition *ag* ‘at’, diagnostic of an unbounded progressing activity. The first participant in the first clause is animate and human and the undergoer. No actor is coded. The second participant is inanimate and not human and denotes the state that affected the first participant, but expressed in the negative within the clause. The state of the undergoer acts as the depictive state for the second clause. The state-of-affairs of the second clause is an unterminated unbounded activity and this is a direct consequence of the resulting state of the first clause in the event action chain.

(32) *Ní fhuair sé a sháith am ar bith, agus bhí an t-ocras ag síor-phiocadh an ghoile aige*.
LIT:’He did not get his sufficiency (of food) anytime at all, and the hunger was continually picking at his stomach’.
He never got enough to eat and the hunger was hurting his stomach.
Ní fhuair sé a sháith am ar bith,
Not:NEG got:PAST he:PN his:POSS-ADJ fullness:N time:N on:PP any:ADV
agus bhí an t-ocras ag síor-phiocadh.

and:CONJ be:SUBV-PAST the:DET hunger:N at:PP continual:ADJ+picking:VN
an ghoile aige
the:DET stomach:N at:PP+him:PN
[NOT [**BE'**(sé$_1$, (**a$_1$**'(sáith)))] &
[**ar bith'**(NOT [**do'**(0, [**fuair'**(sé$_1$, (**a$_1$**'(sáith))))])]] &
CAUSE BECOME [NOT [**BE'**(sé$_1$, (**a$_1$**'(sáith)))]]
& [**BE'**(an t-ocras, [**ag'**(**sior-piochadh'**(an ghoile, (**ag'**(sé))))])]

The example in (33) is transitive with a human animate undergoer as the first participant and a second nominal representing the state that will affect the first participant. An adverbial of time informs us as to when the event happened with respect to a certain point in tine known to the dialogue participants, that is, *ceithre bliana roimhe sin* 'four years before that'. The second nominal encodes the most major state change that a living human can undergo, that is, death. This is precicely what this example encodes. As a consequence of this event the animate human will be dead, that is, human but inanimate. The affectedness is not beneficial to the undergoer.

(33) *Fuair m'athair bás ceithre bliana roimhe sin.*
Got:V-PAST my:POSS-ADJ+father death:N four:NUM years:N before:ADV that:DET
LIT:'My father got death four years before that'.
My father died four years before that.
[[NOT [**BE'**(sé, bás)]] &
[**ceithre bliana roimhe sin'**[**do'**(0, [**fuair'**(sé, bás)])]]
& CAUSE BECOME [**BE'**(sé, bás)]]

Example (34) and (35) demonstrate similar characteristics. The states described have two or more major negative consequences for the undergoer.

(34) *Fuair Brighid Ní Mhaoldoraidh íosbairt agus an-bhás ins an réagún a raibh sí.*
Brighid Ní Mhaoldoraidh got hardship and a violent death in the region that she was in.
Fuair Brighid Ní Mhaoldoraidh íosbairt agus an-bhás
Got:V-PAST Brighid Ní Mhaoldoraidh:N hardship:N and:CONJ violent-death:N
ins an réagún a raibh sí
in:PP the:DET region that:REL be:SUBV she:PN
[[NOT [**BE'**(Brighid Ní Mhaoldoraidh$_1$, íosbairt agus bhás)]] &
[**ins an réagún'**[**BE'**(sí$_1$, [**do'**(0, [**fuair'**(sí$_1$, íosbairt agus an-bhás)])])]]

& CAUSE BECOME [**BE'**(Brighid Ní Mhaoldoraidh$_1$, íosbairt)]
& CAUSE BECOME [**BE'**(Brighid Ní Mhaoldoraidh$_1$, an-bhás)]]]

(35) *Fuair sé cupla scannradh*.
Got:V-PAST he:PN several:DET frights:N
He got several frights.
[[NOT [**BE'**(sé, scannradh)]] &
[**cupla'** [**do'**(0, [**fuair'**(sé, scannradh)])]]
& CAUSE BECOME [**BE'**(sé, scannradh)]]

5.4 Discussion of the GET Passive Construction

Not all GET constructions are functional GET passives, only those where the undergoer is the subject and the direct object encodes a state in which the undergoer will be transformed, in some non-trivial way. The GET passive is therefore not de-transitivising. It orders the participants such that the actor is not coded (or coded obliquely), and the undergoer is the clause subject.

A GET passive is not a syntactic passive in the same way that we understand a personal passive construction to be, rather it is a functionally defined passive that exhibits the characteristics mentioned earlier. In the type of GET construction that we have examined, we have found evidence that a particular subset of constructions precisely exhibits these characteristics under strictly defined constraints.

On the basis of this evidence, we claim that this is a functionally defined GET passive. We will place the functionally defined GET passive in relation to the other passive constructions analysed shortly. Before we can approach this we need to examine the word order in the passive constructions.

6. Word Order in the Passive Constructions

We have already mentioned that Irish follows a **VSO** word order and that the subject is more closely bound to the verb than the object. Having looked at the form of each of the passive constructions, we can now briefly examine how word order is maintained through each. The word order in each construction including the active is

reflected in (36). Clearly, we can see that the VSO order is maintained across each of the constructions.

(36)		
	Active:	VSOX
	BE Passive:	SUBV Undergoer/$NP_{\mathbf{SUBJECT}}$ VA/VN {PP $NP_{\mathbf{IO}}$} {*ag* Actor/**NP**}
	GET Passive:	V Undergoer/$NP_{\mathbf{SUBJECT}}$ NP**state**$_{\mathbf{OBJECT}}$
	Impersonal Passive	$V_{\mathbf{IMPER\text{-}PASS}}$+ *Indefinite_Human_Actor* ***SUBJECT*** Undergoer/$NP_{\mathbf{OBJECT}}$
	BE Impersonal Passive:	$SUBV_{\mathbf{IMPER\text{-}PASS}}$+*Indefinite_Human_Actor* ***SUBJECT*** PP VN{Undergoer/$NP_{\mathbf{OBJECT}}$**}**

The need to preserve VSO order across all constructions can be understood to motivate the various construction schemata, and therefore, some of the behaviours of passives. For example, if the subject is deleted from the active clause with [V**S**O] then we are left with [VO], but this is confusing with intransitive and middle voice i.e. [**V NP].** If the subject is not deleted but simply demoted from [V**S**O] then we arrive at a structure of [VO**S]**, but this causes confusion with the interpretation of transitives using [V NP NP]. In the case of the impersonal passive where we have [V $NP_{\mathbf{DO}}$], the verb is marked morphologically to signify this fact, as we seen in our analysis.

The different construction templates are therefore necessary for the avoidance of structural confusion and the functional communication of the intended meaning by the speaker to the hearer. Through out, the VSOX order is maintained. Indeed, from the evidence presented we can see that VSO order is maintained across each of the passive constructions discussed so far, and that it is necessary to do so.

7. A Unified Analysis of the Passive Voice Constructions

In this paper we have examined the personal passive (and each of its variants), the impersonal passive and the impersonal passive form of the substantive verb. Comrie (1977) has claimed that any explanation of the "*impersonal passive should be within the passive domain*". This means that ideally, the impersonal passive should be explainable in a unified way that includes the other passive voice constructions. We have demonstrated this in our analysis.

We posed a question as to whether a third passive forms exists, that of a functionally defined GET passive. To inform our analysis, we determined the characteristics of the

GET passive from the literature in relation to its occurance in the world's languages and these we used these as a set of diagnostics for testing our hypothesis. We demonstrated that sufficient evidence exists to suggest that our hypothesis is true, that Irish does have a functionally defined third passive construction, the GET passive.

7.1 Window of Attention

The commonality underpinning the passive constructions can be explained in terms of the windowing of attention analysis in the sense of Talmy (1996a), which concerns itself with operations on the event frame, i.e. backgrounding, foregrounding, or gapping of event participant elements. The strategies for different types of passive constructions are primarily motivated by the need to background the actor to some degree, or fully. This is informed by the need of a speaker to create a certain focus of some component of the event, that is, by focus considerations. This commonality between each of these passive forms is clearly demonstrated in (37). This indicates where the particular window of attention lies with each construction type.

(37) **Active**

The logical structure (LS) represents the event frame with the window of attention on the actor.

BE passive

LS represents event frame with the window of attention on the resulting state on the undergoer.

GET passive

LS represents event frame with the window of attention on the undergoer that transforms to the resulting state.

Impersonal passive

LS represents event frame with the window of attention on the verbal action.

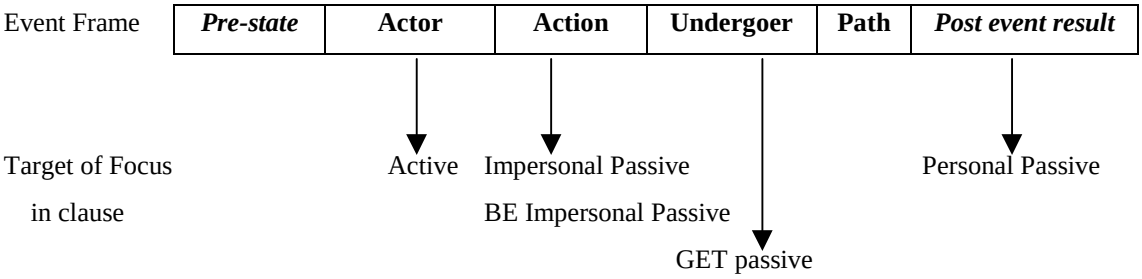
BE Impersonal passive

LS represents event frame with the window of attention on the verbal action.

7.2 Event Frame

This posits an event frame that can highlight the following event structure in an adequate manner. Such a structure is indicated in (38).

(38) **Relationship between perspective on the event frame and clause type**



7.3 Divergences from the Clause Prototype

In terms of divergences from a clause prototype, that is, the active transitive, we have found the following:

(39)

	Prospective passive:	SUB**V** **S**$_{undergoer}$ *le* VN (*ag* NP$_{actor}$)
	Progressive passive:	SUB**V** **S**$_{undergoer}$ (*dh*)*á* VN (*ag* NP$_{actor}$)
	Perfective passive:	SUB**V** **S**$_{undergoer}$ VA (*ag* NP$_{actor}$)
Prototype:	Active Transitive:	**V S O**
	Active Intransitive:	**V S** or SUB**V** **S** *ag* VN
	GET passive:	**V S**$_{undergoer}$ **O**
	Impersonal passive:	**V**$_{impersonal}$ + *Indefinite_Human_Actor* ***SUBJECT*** **O**$_{undergoer}$
	BE Impersonal passive:	SUB**V**$_{impersonal}$ + *Indefinite_Human_Actor* ***SUBJECT*** PP VN **O**$_{undergoer}$

We have analysed the passive constructions of modern Irish and demonstrated that they have an underlying commonality that is best explained in a functional analysis with an event frame perspective sensitive to prototypicality. This analysis takes the active transive clause as the base prototype, from which the other constructions diverge. Included in this commonality is the functionally defined GET passive.

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