

IMPERSONAL OR PASSIVE? SOME APPROACHES TO ANALYSIS (BASED ON THE VEPS AND ESTONIAN LANGUAGES)

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Abstract: This article deals with constructions of the form “*to be* + passive participle” in Veps and Estonian. Depending on the syntactic context, these constructions can be considered either impersonal or passive. Cases where the syntactic properties of the context do not allow us to determine whether a construction is impersonal or passive are the main object of the study. The article proposes two approaches to analysing these cases, using a corpus study in Veps and the analysis of a native speaker survey in Estonian. Analysis of the Veps data shows that 66% of the sample collected cannot be unambiguously attributed to the impersonal or the passive construction. At the same time, there is a correlation between polarity and construction choice: the passive occurs more often in negative contexts and the impersonal occurs more often in affirmative contexts. The results of the Estonian survey show that 88% of constructions are interpreted as passive. Verb tense and stative/dynamic semantics do not correlate with construction type, but there is a relationship between the preverbal position of the nominative argument and the passive construction. It was assumed that in the impersonal construction the argument has a special status and is not a prototypical object but has both object and subject features.

Keywords: impersonal, passive, Finnic languages, Veps language, Estonian language, corpus study, syntactic homonymy

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1. Introduction

This article studies impersonal and passive constructions in Finnic languages. The problem investigated here can be demonstrated by the following examples from Estonian. A transitive sentence (1) can be

transformed into a sentence without a subject in two ways, exemplified here by near-synonymous examples (2) and (3).¹

- (1) *Lapse-d* *sõ-i-d* *õuna-d* *ära*
 child-PL eat-PST-3PL apple-NOM.PL PTCL
 ‘The children ate the apples.’
- (2) *Õuna-d* *söö-di* *ära*
 apple-NOM.PL eat-IPS.PST PTCL
 ‘The apples were eaten.’
- (3) *Õuna-d* *ol-i-d* *ära* *söö-dud*
 apple-NOM.PL be-PST-3PL PTCL eat-PTCP.PASS
 ‘The apples were eaten.’

In (2), the predicate appears in the impersonal form – a Finnic verbal form which is specifically used to express constructions without a subject where the agent of the action is unknown or irrelevant. The argument *õunad* ‘apples’ is traditionally considered an object here (Erelt & Metslang 2017: 210–211). In (3), the predicate consists of the auxiliary *olid* ‘were’ and a passive participle of the verb *sööma* ‘eat’. The argument *õunad* is a subject (as follows from the auxiliary agreement). The construction presented in (3) is known in many languages as a (stative) passive construction (Siewierska 1986; Erelt 2003, 2009: 12–13), cf. the translation of (2) and (3) into English. In what follows, the construction in (2) is called impersonal and the construction in (3) passive.

Though in (2) and (3) the type of construction involved can be identified unambiguously, there are examples where we find syntactic homonymy (4).

- (4) *Õuna-d* *on* *ära* *söö-dud*
 apple-NOM.PL be.PRS.3 PTCL eat-PTCP.PASS
 ‘The apples are eaten.’

1 The translations of (2) and (3) are similar because differences in meaning are minor. Generally, the impersonal form (2) is used to express an action processed by implicit, non-overt agent, the passive form (3) accents the result of the action. Here and hereafter, we do not indicate such differences in the translations.

The sentence in (4) can be interpreted in two different ways – as an impersonal or as a passive. In the impersonal interpretation, the verb has a perfect impersonal form, which consists of the auxiliary *on* ‘be’ and a passive participle, cf. with the 3Sg perfect personal form where the active participle is used instead (5).

- (5) *Oskar on söö-nud õuna-d ära*
 Oskar be.PRS.3 eat-PTCP.ACT apple-NOM.PL PTCL
 ‘Oskar has eaten the apples.’

In the passive interpretation, (4) shows the same construction as in (3), but in the present tense. Since in Estonian the 3Sg and 3Pl present forms of the verb *olla* ‘be’ coincide, it is impossible to determine whether there is agreement between the argument and the predicate. In principle such agreement could have been used as a test to establish whether this argument is a subject (which would control agreement) or an object (which would not), as was done to distinguish object *õunad* ‘apple-PL’ in (2) from subject *õunad* in (3).

Analytic constructions with verb ‘be’ + passive participle as in (4) can be found in every Finnic language except Livonian (Laanest 1975: 157).² However, the ambiguity of these constructions has not been studied extensively. The problem was detected and analysed for Estonian by Rajandi (1968/1999), Lees (2006), Torn (2006b), Torn-Leesik (2007; 2009; 2016). The difference between passive and impersonal constructions is also recognized by Estonian grammars (Ross et al. 1993; Erelt 2003; Ross, Erelt & Erelt 2007; Erelt 2009). These works will be discussed in detail in Section 2.

In Finnish, earlier studies of the impersonal/passive domain did not focus heavily on analytic constructions. For example, the classic study on the Finnish passive by Shore (1988) is based on an analysis of impersonal forms as in (2) (they are called *indefinite*) but does not address constructions with passive participles (the same approach is presented in a more recent study Manninen & Nelson 2004). However, the most recent version of the authoritative Finnish grammar distinguishes between the one-person passive (*yksipersonainen passiivi*) and the

2 In Livonian a construction with auxiliary verb *sõdõ* ‘get’ + passive participle *-tõd* is more commonly used (Norvik 2015).

multipersonal passive (*monipersonainen passiivi*) (Hakulinen et al. 2004: §1313), which can be referred to as impersonal vs passive constructions mentioned before. Later papers (Heinat & Manninen 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Manninen 2013) pay attention specifically to constructions with passive participle (as in (4)), which are called *personal passive constructions* in Finnish. In earlier papers, e.g. (Kangasmaa-Minn 1979), it was stated that these constructions do not exist in Finnish. The comparative work of Lees (2006) suggests a diachronic analysis of impersonal and passive constructions in Old Estonian and Finnish texts, comparing them with modern texts. She found that “in Finnish compound forms there was a preponderance of impersonals, while in Estonian the personal passive was predominant” (Lees 2006: 14).

We have not come across any publications on this problem in other Finnic languages. This reflects the fact that many grammatical descriptions do not distinguish between impersonal and passive constructions in the first place. Traditionally, many studies on grammatical voice focus on the opposition between active and passive forms (Siewierska 1986), though it is more relevant to speak about the opposition between personal and impersonal forms in the Finnic languages (see Shore 1988; Blevins 2003). Although both oppositions can be considered in Finnic languages, passive and impersonal constructions are not usually treated in the same grammatical description of a minor Finnic language. It also caused terminological confusion across various papers concerning different Finnic languages. For example, discussing *olda* (*to be*) + *past passive participle -tu* constructions in Veps, Zajceva (2002: 165) uses the term “historical passive”, while in Grünthal (2015) these constructions are called “impersonal” and sometimes also “passive”. Erelt (2003) gives a paradigm of *impersonal* forms in Estonian while the corresponding forms in the Finnish grammar (Hakulinen et al. 2004) are called *passive*.

An issue that has been missed in the existing studies is the interpretation of ambiguous examples like (4) by native speakers. Can they distinguish between impersonal and passive constructions in their own speech? The problem requires a profound and comprehensive study, which cannot be carried out in a single article. In this paper, we would like to present the results of two studies on the matter. The studies are based on Estonian and Veps and are not intended to be comparable. The collecting data possibilities are different in these languages. For

Estonian it is not difficult to conduct an experiment by interviewing native speakers, while for Veps it seems to be problematic. However, for Veps, there is a corpus containing texts in the standard language. In this paper we intentionally try to analyse the problem using different methods and data. In the first case, we use Veps material from the corpus of Veps (mainly newspaper texts). In the second case, we interview native speakers of Estonian and focus on spoken language.

The current study aims to test the different approaches to the problem described above. Taking these approaches to research the same problem in different ways, we raise the question whether it is possible to obtain similar results using two fundamentally different approaches. Each approach is also used to analyse what factors may determine the choice of passive or impersonal construction in a text. Depending on the possibilities of a particular approach, we intend to test factors such as polarity, verb tense, semantics of context and the position of argument.

Section 2 contains a theoretical overview of the problem. In Section 3, Veps corpus data are used to study the relation between impersonal and passive constructions. Section 4 studies the use of the two constructions in Estonian based on the analysis of an experiment among Estonian speakers. Section 5 discusses the results of the research, focusing on possible interpretations of the data from Sections 3 and 4.

2. Theoretical background

In this section, we will examine where the ambiguity of the constructions under study comes from and what the differences between them are.

Paradigm of Finnic verb has a set of impersonal forms (including both synthetic and analytic). Impersonal constructions have no subject³ which could control agreement in person or number (unlike personal verb forms). However, the analytical impersonal forms consist of an auxiliary *be*-verb in the third person singular form and a passive participle. Meanwhile, the passive constructions consist of the same

3 In impersonal constructions in Estonian, the agent can be occasionally expressed, apparently by analogy with passive constructions. See discussions in (Rajandi 1968/1999: 70; Torn 2006a; Vihman 2004: 171; Metslang et al. 2023: 590).

components (auxiliary *be*-verb and passive participle), but unlike impersonals they have a subject that controls agreement marking on the predicate. As a result, some forms in the impersonal and passive paradigms coincide. Table 1 presents the paradigms of indicative impersonal and present and past passive constructions in Standard Veps. Identical forms in the impersonal and passive paradigms are marked in bold. In Estonian, the structure of the two paradigms is similar, except for the auxiliary verb, which doesn't distinguish number in the 3rd person of the present tense forms (i.e. Estonian *on tehtud* be.3SG/3PL do-PTCP.PASS 'is/are done').

Table 1. Impersonal and passive paradigms of the verb *tehta* 'to do' in Veps.

	Impersonal	Passive	
Present	<i>tehtas</i>	1SG <i>olen tehtud</i> 2SG <i>oled tehtud</i> 3SG <i>om tehtud</i>	1PL <i>olem tehtud</i> 2PL <i>olet tehtud</i> 3PL <i>oma (omad) tehtud</i>
Past	<i>tehti</i>	1SG <i>olin tehtud</i> 2SG <i>olid tehtud</i> 3SG <i>oli tehtud</i>	1PL <i>olim tehtud</i> 2PL <i>olit tehtud</i> 3PL <i>oliba (olibad) tehtud</i>
Perfect	<i>om tehtud</i>		
Pluperfect	<i>oli tehtud</i>		

In Table 1, the impersonal perfect form *om tehtud* coincides with the passive present form, and the impersonal pluperfect form *oli tehtud* coincides with the passive past form. Though formally we deal with different grammatical tenses, the meanings of impersonal perfect vs passive present or impersonal pluperfect vs passive past are close, i.e. there are many contexts where the two constructions can be used without a significant difference in meaning.

Despite featuring identical forms and similar meanings, the impersonal and passive constructions have different syntactic properties. The analytic forms of the impersonal use the auxiliary verb "to be" in the third person. In the passive construction, the verb "to be" may be used in any person and number. Moreover, only transitive verbs can be found in passive constructions, while both transitive and non-transitive constructions can be used in impersonal ones. The main function of both constructions is agent defocusing. For more detailed discussions on

passivization vs impersonalization, valence changing, argument promotion and topicalization and grammatical semantics of the passives and impersonals, see Siewierska (1986: 96–97), Blevins (2003: 483–485), Erelt (2003: 102–103), Vihman (2004: 208), Torn-Leesik (2016).

As mentioned above, impersonal constructions do not have a subject, whereas passive constructions do. The syntactic object in the impersonal construction may be expressed by the partitive or nominative; in passive constructions no syntactic object is found because the undergoer is expressed by the syntactic subject. Since the subject in passive constructions is in the nominative (just like the object in many impersonal constructions), it is impossible to distinguish the object in the impersonal from the subject in the passive by case marking.

However, this is true only for affirmative constructions. In their negative counterparts, the object always takes the partitive form, while the subject remains in the nominative. In this case, an argument in the partitive is necessarily the object and implies an impersonal interpretation (6), and an argument in the nominative cannot be the object and thus implies a passive interpretation (7).

- (6) *Tedo-s om äi küzund-oid, kudamb-i-he*
 science-INE be.PRS.3SG many question-PL.PART which-PL-ILL
ei ole löu-tud vastus-id
 NEG.3SG be.CNG find-PTCP.PASS answer-PL.PART
 ‘There are lots of questions in science that have not been answered yet.’
 (VepKar: Kodima 2010, 1)⁴

- (7) *Muzeja-ha ei ole vedä-tud vezi*
 museum-ILL NEG.3SG be.CNG set-PTCP.PASS water.NOM
 ‘The museum has no water supply.’ (VepKar Kodima 2015, 6)⁵

The syntactic differences between impersonal and passive constructions are outlined in Table 2.

4 All the Veps examples in this article are taken from the Veps language corpus VepKar (see the list of sources at the end of the article).

5 For a neutral word order we would expect the subject to be in preposition to the predicate, but in (7) we deal with a piece of colloquial speech where the word order is determined by information structure. Cf. (9), where a time adverbial *muzejän praznikan aigan* ‘during the museum festival’ is a topic of the sentence and the nominative phrase in postposition is an object.

Table 2. Restrictions on the use of impersonal vs passive constructions in Finnic.

	Impersonal	Passive
Person & number of the auxiliary verb “to be” in periphrastic constructions	3SG only	any person & number (depending on the subject)
Transitive/intransitive verbs	both transitive and intransitive	transitive verbs only
Patient argument marking in affirmative	NOM / PART (object)	NOM (subject)
Patient argument marking in negative	PART (object)	NOM (subject)

The features listed in Table 2 can be used to determine whether a construction is impersonal or passive.

For example, (8) is a passive construction (there is agreement with the plural subject), and (9) is an impersonal construction (there is no agreement with the plural subject).

- (8) *Kaik kodikalu-d perti-š ol-i-ba teh-tud*
 all tableware-NOM.PL house-INE be-PST-3PL do-PTCP.PASS
ičelaze
 oneself.ADE
 ‘All tableware in the house was handmade.’ (VepKar Kipinä 2020, 6).

- (9) *Muzeja-n praznika-n aigan ol-i*
 museum-GEN festival-GEN during be-PST.3SG
teh-tud erazvuičče-d mastar'-klassa-d
 do-PTCP.PASS various-NOM.PL workshop-NOM.PL
 ‘During the museum festival, various workshops had been held.’ (VepKar Kodima 2018, 6)

The conditions for ambiguity between constructions to occur are therefore as follows:

- 1) the argument is in the nominative case,
- 2) the sentence is affirmative,
- 3) the predicate is transitive.

Example (10) demonstrates a construction which could be attributed to either type.

- (10) *Nece sarn om kirjuta-dud vepsä-n*
 this fairytale.NOM be.PRS.3SG write-PTCP.PASS Veps-GEN
sarna-n pohjal "El'getoma-d mehe-d"
 fairytale-GEN based mindless-NOM.PL man-NOM.PL
 'This fairytale is based on the Veps fairy tale "Mindless people"' (Vep-
 Kar Kodima 2018, 6)

The form *om kirjutadud* can be interpreted as an impersonal perfect (*nece sarn* 'this fairytale' is in the nominative as an object) or as a present passive (*nece sarn* is a subject).

Below we consider this problem in more detail on the basis of material from Estonian, as this is the most heavily studied at the moment. In recent grammatical descriptions of the Estonian language, passive constructions are treated separately from impersonal constructions, the two constructions receive different terminological labels. The passive is often called *resultative (stative) passive* (Ross, Ereht & Ereht 2007; Ereht 2003, 2009; Ereht & Metslang 2017; Metslang et al. 2023). In earlier studies the impersonal was called *subjectless passive (subjektita passiiv)* and passive was called *subjective (stative) passive (subjektiline seisundpassiiv)* (Ross et al. 1993: 30).

The papers of Torn-Leesik (e.g. Torn 2006b, Torn-Leesik 2009), in particular her dissertation on the voice system of Estonian (Torn-Leesik 2016), study the differences between impersonal and passive constructions in detail and also reveals the problem of syncretism of these constructions in some contexts. This problem is also discussed in Ereht & Metslang (2017).

Torn-Leesik (2009) notes that in Estonian, the perfect and pluperfect tense forms of the impersonal coincide with the present and past tense forms of the passive, as illustrated in Table 3 ('The books are/were/have been/had been read').

Table 3. Paradigms of impersonal and passive constructions in Estonian (Torn-Leesik 2009: 85).

	Impersonal			Passive		
Present	<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>loe-takse</i> read-IPS.PRS	<i>läbi</i> through	<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>on</i> be.PRS.3	<i>läbi</i> through
				<i>loe-tud</i> read-PTCP.PASS		
Past	<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>loe-ti</i> read-IPS.PST	<i>läbi</i> through	<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>ol-i-d</i> be-PST-3PL	<i>läbi</i> through
				<i>loe-tud</i> read-PTCP.PASS		
Perfect	<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>on</i> be.PRS.3	<i>läbi</i> through	<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>on</i> be.PRS.3	<i>ol-nud</i> be-PTCP.ACT
	<i>loe-tud</i> read-PTCP.PASS			<i>läbi</i> through	<i>loe-tud</i> read-PTCP.PASS	
Pluperfect	<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>ol-i(d)</i> be.PST.3SG(3PL)		<i>Raamatud</i> books.NOM	<i>ol-i-d</i> be-PST-3PL	<i>ol-nud</i> be-PTCP.ACT
	<i>läbi</i> through	<i>loe-tud</i> read-PTCP.PASS		<i>läbi</i> through	<i>loe-tud</i> read-PTCP.PASS	

As seen from Table 3, the auxiliary verb *olema* ‘be’ in the pluperfect can be used in both singular and plural (*oli* ‘be.PST.3SG’ ~ *olid* ‘be.PST.3PL’). Torn-Leesik (2009: 85–86) observed the following tendency: if the argument (subject in the passive or object in the impersonal construction) is in the nominative form, the predicate agrees with it in number.

This tendency reflects in part the fact that nominatives trigger agreement in Estonian and that preverbal nominatives are predominantly subjects. The fact that the nominative can trigger agreement even though it does not function as the subject conforms to a pattern that has been attested also in other languages (e.g. in Icelandic, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2005) (Torn-Leesik 2009: 85–86).

Erelt, Mati & Helle Metslang (2017: 217) mention the same tendency, noting that the predicate often agrees with the object in number in conditions where the two constructions are ambiguous (i.e., in affirmative sentences with an argument in the nominative and a transitive verb as predicate). None of these works offer criteria by which to determine whether a construction must be analysed as impersonal or passive in

this case. Note that number agreement does not occur in the synthetic impersonal forms because these forms do not distinguish between singular and plural.

The fact that the impersonal analytic constructions can demonstrate number agreement with the argument is hard to interpret. It would mean either that object agreement has developed in Estonian even though traditionally nothing of the kind has been attested in Finnic, or that the argument in impersonal constructions is not an object and the analysis presented in most works on this topic (Holvoet 2001; Torn-Leesik 2016; Erelt & Metslang 2017, etc.) is not correct.

However, despite the tendency to show agreement, the passive and impersonal constructions are generally treated as different constructions due to other patterns (such as case-marking under negation), which were described earlier in this section.

Asking how two distinct constructions can be composed of identical components, Torn-Leesik proposes a solution based on a Construction Grammar approach, namely that the Estonian impersonal and the Estonian personal passive constructions may be built of identical parts but have different features: “the unspecified *-tud*-participle is realised as a verb in impersonal constructions and has an adjectival nature in passive constructions” (Torn-Leesik 2016: 58; see also Torn 2006b: 74–76; Rajandi 1968/1999).

The Estonian passive and impersonal constructions can be considered as separate grammatical entities since the standard passive construction can sometimes impersonalize the auxiliary verb ‘to be’. There are two types of such constructions, see examples (11) and (12).

- (11) *loomavagunites* *ol-di* *massiliselt* *küüdita-tud*
 animal.car.PL.INE be-IPS.PST massively deport-PTCP.PASS
 ‘People were deported in great numbers (in cattle cars).’ (Vihman 2002: 7)
- (12) *teda* *ol-di* *pildista-tud*
 3SG.PART be-IPS.PST photograph-PTCP.PASS
 ‘S/he was photographed.’ (Vihman 2002: 7)

In both types the auxiliary verb ‘to be’ is used in the past impersonal form. Basically, these constructions have the same meaning as the ordinary passive constructions illustrated in Table 3. In (11) both agent (those who deported) and patient (those who were deported) are

impersonalized, and neither subject nor object is explicitly expressed; this construction has been labelled the *impersonalized passive*. Meanwhile, the term *impersonalized impersonal* has been suggested for the construction in (12): here the same construction is used, but with an explicitly expressed patient (*teda*). These constructions were discussed in (Vihman 2002; Vihman 2006). Although we do not study the impersonalized impersonals in this article, we present these examples here to demonstrate that two formally distinct but semantically close constructions can merge into one combining each other's features.

Although the problem was posed and analysed in the papers above, whether it is possible to determine the type of construction exemplified in a particular situation was not discussed in detail. In the following sections, we will analyse these constructions to study how frequently they are found in texts, which factors affect the choice of the construction and whether native speakers can determine the construction type involved in a given case.

3. Impersonal vs passive constructions in Veps (corpus-based study)

This section focuses on the correlation between impersonal and passive constructions in the Veps language. Grammatical descriptions of Veps do not draw a clear distinction between impersonal forms and passive forms. Thus, in Zajceva (2002: 161–168) all these forms are called *historical passive* forms. They are divided into two groups. Impersonal forms are called *synthetic passive*. The forms that are built with auxiliary verb *olda* 'be' and past participle are called *analytic passive* forms, or *passive imperfect* and *pluperfect* forms (Zajceva 2002: 165–169). In Grünthal (2015), neither impersonal nor passive constructions are mentioned at all (though the past participle *-tud* is mentioned as impersonal).

The standard Veps language has been developing only for the last 30 years. The modern grammatical descriptions also do not distinguish between passive and impersonal constructions. In particular, an auxiliary verb is supposed to be used in 3SG in all constructions with *-tud*, implying that all such constructions are impersonal (not passive). There is no detailed description of the syntax of these constructions

in the grammar, as regards agreement of the argument and predicate and subject/object marking (Zajceva 2000: 175–181; Zajceva 2002: 161–170).

The aim of this study was to collect constructions of the form “*to be*” + *passive participle* from texts of Standard Veps and analyse the relationship and correlation between three groups of constructions: 1) unambiguously impersonal, 2) unambiguously passive and 3) constructions that cannot be unambiguously assigned to either of the two groups.

The study is based on Standard Veps texts where a clear distinction between impersonal and 3PL forms exists. The texts were collected from the open corpus of the Veps language (VepKar). The affirmative forms were collected from a sample of 105 texts randomly selected from the corpus. Negative forms were searched through the entire corpus of literary Veps, i.e. 723 texts, because they are used much more rarely. We searched for constructions formed by the auxiliary verb *olda* ‘be’ (the auxiliary verb in the present or past tense) + past passive participle *-tud/-dud*. In addition, in Veps there are also future tense constructions;⁶ they use the auxiliary verb *linda* ‘be’ + past passive participle *-tud/-dud*. Table 4 demonstrates the forms of the verb *tehtä* ‘do’ as an example of the forms that were sampled.

Table 4. A list of the analytic forms searched for in the corpus (verb *tehtä* ‘do’ as an example).

	Aff (3SG)	Aff (3PL)	Neg
Present	<i>om tehtud</i>	<i>oma tehtud</i>	<i>ei ole tehtud</i>
Past	<i>oli tehtud</i>	<i>oliba tehtud</i>	<i>ei olend tehtud</i>
Future	<i>linneb tehtud</i>	<i>linneba tehtud</i>	<i>ei linne tehtud</i>

To distinguish between impersonal and passive constructions the following criteria were used. Constructions without an argument in the nominative (13), as well as those with an argument in the nominative that does not control number agreement on the predicate (and can thus be identified as an object) (14) were considered *unambiguously*

⁶ This form is not mentioned at all in grammars of Veps, but there is a recent study by Kuznetsov (2021).

impersonal. Constructions with a subject in plural and number agreement were considered *unambiguously passive* (15). Constructions not assigned to the previous groups were placed into the group of *ambiguous constructions* (16). The examples below illustrate these groups.

a. Unambiguously impersonal constructions:

- (13) *Laps-i-le om nevo-tud, miše purtki-d*
 child-PL-ALL be.3SG advise-PTCP.PASS that spring-PL
ei sa paganoit-ta, ei sa sinna sül'k-ta,
 NEG can spoil-INF NEG can there spit-INF
ei sa tac-ta ved-he nimi-dä
 NEG can throw-INF water-ILL something-PART
 ‘**Children were told** not to desecrate the springs, not to spit in them, not to throw anything into the water.’ (VepKar: Verez Tulei, 2018)

- (14) *Foto-d om teh-tud Piteri-n*
 photo-NOM.PL be.3SG do-PTCP.PASS Leningrad-GEN
agja-n Podporožje-n rajona-n Kurb-külä-n
 region-GEN Podporozhje-GEN district-GEN Kurb-village-GEN
vepsläiže-s muzeja-s
 Veps-INE museum-INE
 ‘**The photos are taken** at the Veps museum in the village of Kurb, Podporozhsky district, Leningrad region.’ (VepKar: Kipinä 2020, 6)

In the first clause (13) (*Lapsile on nevodud*), there is no subject or object in the nominative, therefore the predicate *om nevodud* ‘is advised’ is considered to be an impersonal construction. In (14) the plural argument *foto-d* ‘photos’ does not agree in number with the predicate *om tehtud* ‘is done’ (the plural form would be *oma*), so we also categorize this construction as impersonal.

b. Unambiguously passive constructions:

- (15) *Kaik kodikalu-d perti-š ol-i-ba teh-tud*
 all tableware-NOM.PL house-INE be-PST-3PL do-PTCP.PASS
ičelaze
 oneself.ADE
 ‘**All the tableware** in the house **was handmade**.’ (VepKar: Kipinä 2020, 6)

Unlike (14), the noun *kodikalud* ‘houseware’ in (15) agrees in number with the predicate *oliba tehtud*, therefore *kodikalud* is taken to be the subject and *oliba tehtud* is a passive construction.

c. Ambiguous constructions:

- (16) *Kaik koncert ol-i vede-tud vepsä-n*
 all concert.NOM be-PST.3SG conduct-PTCP.PASS Veps-GEN
kele-l
 language-ADE
 ‘The whole **concert was held** in the Veps language.’ (VepKar: Kodima 2016, 6)

In (16), the argument *koncert* ‘concert’ is in the nominative case, the predicate *oli vedetud* ‘was held’ is transitive. Since the argument is in the singular, by agreement it is not clear whether the argument in the nominative is a subject (and the predicate is passive) or whether it is an object (in which case the predicate is impersonal).

In (16) the 3rd person of the auxiliary *oli* can be either the result of agreement with the subject in case of a passive construction or a form required by the impersonal construction (irrespective of the arguments). The sentence doesn’t give us any cues which of these two interpretations is meant. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Impersonal and passive forms of the indicative in Veps.

Auxiliary verb form + passive participle <i>-tud</i>	Impersonal	Ambiguous (impersonal or passive)	Passive	Total
Affirmative forms				
PRS <i>om/oma + -tud</i>	54	79	8	141
PST <i>oli/oliba + -tud</i>	68	145	6	219
FUT <i>linneb/linneba + -tud</i>	3	4	3	10
Total affirmative	125 (34%)	228 (62%)	17 (4%)	370
Negative forms				
PRS <i>ei ole + -tud</i>	3		19	22
PST <i>ei olend + -tud</i>	1		11	12
FUT <i>ei linne + -tud</i>	1		4	5
Total negative	5 (13%)		34 (87%)	39

Affirmative and negative forms are analysed separately. The percentages in the table express the total for each column as a proportion of the overall total (affirmative or negative). Among the negative forms, no examples fell into the ‘ambiguous’ group. When a nominative argument is present, it is unambiguously identifiable as a subject, because of the restriction in Veps that does not allow a nominative object in negative constructions. An argument in the nominative allows us to classify the construction as passive, and the absence of such an argument classifies the construction as impersonal.⁷

Most forms in the data (62% of affirmative forms) cannot be unambiguously classified as passive or impersonal. Although there are contexts where passive and impersonal forms can be identified unambiguously, the zone of uncertainty for these constructions is the most extensive. The rest of the data shows the following distribution. Most of the affirmative forms are used with the impersonal: 125 (34%) out of 370 constructions, or excluding the ambiguous constructions, 125 (88%) out of 142. The negative forms are mostly passive: 34 (87%) out of 39.

The analysis of the two unambiguous groups (that is excluding ambiguous constructions), which make up 44% of the two samples (181 out of 409), demonstrates a strong asymmetry between the use of passive and impersonal constructions (see Table 6). The proportion between impersonal and passive constructions is radically different for affirmative and negative sentences. Among affirmative sentences, there are about 7 times more impersonal constructions than passive ones (125:17); for negative sentences the proportion is the opposite, there are about 7 times more passive constructions than impersonal ones (5:34).

Table 6. The extracted data on impersonal vs passive constructions.

	Impersonal	Passive	Total
Affirmative	125	17	142
Negative	5	34	39
Total	130	51	181

7 In our paper formal criteria to determine the type of constructions are used. It does not consider elliptic constructions where the argument is omitted and the fact that subjects can occur in the partitive. Fortunately, in our sample, the number of these exceptions is sporadic and could not affect the results of the study.

Since we are dealing with two groups of categorical data (presented in a 2-by-2 contingency table), to find a significant association between impersonal vs passive constructions and polarity, a χ^2 test (with Yates's correction for continuity) was used for this part of the data (Table 6). The χ^2 value = 81.839 and p -value < 2.2e-16 show that a significant association exists between construction type (impersonal vs passive) and polarity. This points to the interpretation that the polarity of the sentence (affirmation vs negation) is a key factor when choosing the type of construction: impersonal forms predominate among affirmative sentences, and passive forms predominate among negative sentences.

However, it is likely that this asymmetry was caused by the fact that a significant part of the data was considered as ambiguous and was not included to the calculations above. If we assume that all ambiguous constructions are passive (the opposite assumption only increases the asymmetry) and include them to our sample, we will find that passive constructions predominate in both affirmative and negative sentences (see Table 7).

Table 7. The summarized data on impersonal vs passive+ambiguous constructions.

	Impersonal	Passive+Ambiguous	Total
Affirmative	125	245	370
Negative	5	34	39
Total	130	279	409

However, χ^2 test still shows a correlation between impersonality/passivity and polarity. Using χ^2 test (with Yates's correction for continuity) for the data in Table 7 we obtain a p -value of $0.01 < 0.05$, meaning that a significant association exists between polarity and the choice of impersonal vs passive forms.

Based on the calculations made with the data from Tables 6 and 7, we can argue that polarity affects the choice of the construction: in negative contexts, passive constructions are more likely to be used than impersonal ones.

4. Impersonal vs personal constructions in Estonian (a survey-based study)

4.1 Goal of the experiment

This section deals with the passive and impersonal constructions in Estonian and discusses an experiment which studies how native speakers interpret ambiguous constructions and what factors influence their interpretation.

As mentioned in Section 2, affirmative clauses with transitive verbs and a nominative argument (17a) can be interpreted as both passive and impersonal, and in most cases, there are no cues to distinguish between them. However, this problem does not occur with negative clauses, because impersonal negative constructions cannot have an argument in the nominative, but use a partitive argument instead. That means that (17b) can be analysed as a passive construction (with a focus on resultative semantics) and (17c) is supposed to be an impersonal construction (with a focus on the absence of the process).

- (17) a. *Töö on teh-tud*
 work.NOM be.PRS.3SG do-PTCP.PASS
 ‘The work is done.’
- b. *Töö ei ole teh-tud*
 work.NOM NEG be.PRS.3SG do-PTCP.PASS
 ‘The work is not done.’
- c. *Töö-d ei ole teh-tud*
 work-PART NEG be.PRS.3SG do-PTCP.PASS
 ‘The work is not done.’

We assume that for every affirmative sentence it is possible to compose a negative counterpart. The different marking of arguments in affirmative and negative contexts allows us to make the following assumptions. If native speakers can interpret a construction as passive or impersonal in affirmative contexts, then they would be expected to choose the same construction – either passive or impersonal – when producing the negative counterpart. If the argument preserves the nominative case in the negative form, then we consider this construction passive. If the partitive argument in the negative sentence corresponds to the nominative argument in the original affirmative sentence, then

this construction is considered impersonal. If native speakers do not distinguish between the two constructions, they will regularly choose different construction types or even both in response to the same original sentence.

This approach has certain limitations. The task given in experiment of deriving a negative clause from a prompted affirmative clause is not one which occurs often in natural speech, which affects the naturalness of received answers. There also may be other differences between negative and affirmative clauses that also affect the choice of the passive/impersonal construction and the final interpretation of it. The argument in nominative in the stimulus being a highly frequent case can also influence the choice of the case in the counterpart. Thus, the results obtained in the experiment should be considered taking into account the limitations above.

4.2. Design of the experiment

Based on these assumptions we designed an experiment. Respondents were given 10 affirmative sentences with constructions under discussion which they were asked to convert into negative sentences.

They received the following instructions in Estonian:

*Asendage **paksus kirjas** jaatavad vormid eitavatega. Kui arvate, et on rohkem, kui üks variant, pange kõik. Vastus peab olema täislause. Kui on vaja, tehke kogu lause ümber. Kui on mingeid kommentaare, siis jagage neid ka. Laused on võetud ajalehtedest ja kirjandusest, aga mõned on modifitseeritud.*

*Näide: Täna ma **jään** koju. Vastus: Täna ma ei jää koju.*

[ENG: Replace the affirmative forms **in bold** with negative forms. If you think there is more than one option, write all of them. The answer must be a complete sentence. If necessary, rewrite the whole sentence. If there are any comments, please share them. The sentences are taken from newspapers and literature, but some have been modified.

Example: *Täna ma **jään** koju. Answer: Täna ma ei jää koju.]*

Thus, the negative sentences were used to test which of the two constructions – impersonal or passive – is found in the affirmative sentence.

The sentences were taken from the Estonian language corpus *Keeleveeb* (Tasakaalus korpus) containing affirmative transitive constructions with a *-tud*-participle. A small number of sentences was used so that the participants would not become tired, and their answers would not become unreliable. The fillers were not used in the survey for the same reason.

We chose the set of factors that were most likely to influence the choice of interpretation. These factors are as follows:

- position of the nominative argument (before or after the auxiliary verb *olema*)
- type of the context (stative or dynamic)
- tense of the predicate (present or past tense of the auxiliary verb)

As a result, among the 10 sentences there are:

- 1) 5 sentences with a preposed and 5 sentences with a postposed nominal argument
- 2) 4 sentences with stative contexts and 6 sentences with dynamic contexts
- 3) 6 sentences in present tense and 4 in past

The list of sentences is presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. List of the sentences surveyed, with factors.

N	Affirmative	Preposed (pre) or postposed (post) nominative	Present (pres) or past tense	Stative (stat) or dynamic (dyn)
1	Laenu tagasimaksmise <i>period on seotud</i> laenu summaga. 'The pay-back <i>period is related</i> to the amount of the loan'	pre	pres	stat
2	Vahepeal <i>oli Jakob saadetud</i> õpetajaks Pandiveresse. 'Meanwhile <i>Jacob was sent</i> as a teacher to Pandivere'	post	past	dyn
3	Nõukogude ajal <i>oli</i> indiviidi <i>vabadus</i> teatavasti täielikult <i>piiratud</i> . 'During the Soviet era, individual <i>freedom was</i> , obviously, completely <i>restricted</i> '	post	past	stat

N	Affirmative	Preposed (pre) or postposed (post) nominative	Present (pres) or past tense	Stative (stat) or dynamic (dyn)
4	<i>Etendus oli tehtud</i> professionaalsel tasemel. 'The <i>performance</i> was done at a professional level'	pre	past	dyn
5	Eile õhtuks <i>oli põleng kustutatud</i> . 'By yesterday evening the <i>fire</i> was put out '	post	past	dyn
6	<i>Köögiviljad on koristatud</i> . ' <i>Vegetables</i> have been collected '	pre	pres	dyn
7	Tema töö <i>on tehtud</i> . 'The <i>work</i> is done '	pre	pres	dyn
8	Passikontrolli <i>kabiinid on varustatud</i> arvutitega. 'Passport control <i>booths</i> are equipped with computers'	pre	pres	stat
9	Tabelis <i>on esitatud</i> reaalkursi <i>muutumine</i> REER-i järgi. 'In the table, the <i>change</i> in the real exchange rate according to REER is shown '	post	pres	stat
10	Kui selline kohtumiste ja turniiride plaan realiseerida, <i>on ülesanne täidetud</i> . 'If this schedule of meetings and tournaments can be realized, the <i>task</i> will be accomplished '	post	pres	dyn

At the end of the experiment, participants had to indicate their age and their place of birth (a city, a town or a village in Estonia), as we intended to check whether these parameters could influence the results. The survey link was published in the Facebook group “Keelekiirabi” (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/502152866820603>), which is usually used for discussions about the Estonian language. Most of the members of this group are Estonians. A criterion for participation in the survey was being a native speaker of Estonian. The survey was performed online 23.02.22–27.02.22 (link: <https://survey.questionstar.ru/64958462>). The number of participants who completed the survey was 68 (only fully completed questionnaires were included in the final sample).

To study what factors affect the distribution of answers we used a Pearson's χ^2 test with Yates's continuity correction and calculated possible associations between the choice of the passive/impersonal strategy and the following criteria: 1) preposition/postposition of the nominative argument to the predicate, 2) present/past tense and 3) type of the context (stative/dynamic meanings). In the calculation, 2-by-2 tables were composed where the columns represented the passive and impersonal forms, and responses allowing 2 options were counted in both groups.

4.3 Results

The results of the survey are presented in Table 9.⁸ The answers were divided into three groups. The first group of answers uses the passive strategy (see PASS column in the table): the respondents constructed negative sentences using the same argument in the nominative as was found in the corresponding affirmative sentence (i.e. *Köögiviljad* (NOM.PL) *on koristatud* → *Köögiviljad* (NOM.PL) *ei ole koristatud*, 'Vegetables have been collected' vs 'Vegetables have not been collected'). The second group of answers uses the impersonal strategy (see IPS column in the table): the respondents changed the case of the nominative argument to the partitive in the negative sentences (*Köögiviljad* (NOM.PL) *on koristatud* → *Köögivilju* (PART.PL) *ei ole koristatud*, 'Vegetables have been collected' vs 'Vegetables have not been collected'). Most of the respondents chose only one of the two strategies, but there were also a few answers from respondents who gave both variants. These answers were placed in a third group (see PASS&IPS column in the table). The table excludes impersonalized passive forms (discussed earlier in respect with (11)) and unacceptable variants, when participants significantly rephrased the original sentence (e.g. a different verb was used), did not write an answer or did not complete the sentence.

8 This table does not include a few responses with impersonalized passive constructions; these responses are discussed in Appendix.

Table 9. Affirmative stimuli.

	Affirmative	PASS	IPS	PASS& IPS
1	<i>Laenu tagasimaksmise periood on seotud laenu summaga.</i> 'The pay-back period is related to the amount of the loan'	63	0	0
2	<i>Vahepeal oli Jakob saadetud õpetajaks Pandiveresse.</i> 'Meanwhile Jakob was sent as a teacher to Pandivere'	46	20	1
3	<i>Nõukogude ajal oli indiviidi vabadus teatavasti täielikult piiratud.</i> 'During the Soviet era, individual freedom was, obviously, completely restricted'	58	3	2
4	<i>Etendus oli tehtud professionaalsel tasemel.</i> 'The performance was done at a professional level'	54	0	1
5	<i>Eile õhtuks oli põleng kustutatud.</i> 'By yesterday evening the fire was put out'	56	6	1
6	<i>Köögiviljad on koristatud.</i> 'Vegetables have been collected'	61	1	3
7	<i>Tema töö on tehtud.</i> 'The work is done'	62	0	1
8	<i>Passikontrolli kabiinid on varustatud arvutitega.</i> 'Passport control booths are equipped with computers'	50	3	1
9	<i>Tabelis on esitatud reaalkursi muutumine REER-i järgi.</i> 'In the table, the change in the real exchange rate according to REER is shown'	33	23	6
10	<i>Kui selline kohtumiste ja turniiride plaan realiseerida, on ülesanne täidetud.</i> 'If this schedule of meetings and tournaments can be realized, the task will be accomplished'	52	3	0

The results show that the passive strategy predominates overall. However, it is noticeable that for two sentences (2 and 9 in the table), respondents used an impersonal strategy significantly more often than in all other sentences, so in these cases the participants could not interpret the constructions unambiguously.

The following Tables 10, 11, 12 present the final data and the results of Pearson's χ^2 test. The data in the tables were compiled by summarizing the PASS and IPS columns in Table 9 with respect to the

parameters studied. Data from the PASS&IPS column were combined with the data from the PASS and the IPS columns, respectively. In Table 10, the data concerning preposed arguments is based on sentences 1, 4, 6, 7, 8, the data for postposed arguments is based on 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, respectively. In Table 11, the data for present tense is based on sentences 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, the data for past tense is based on sentences 2, 3, 4, 5. In Table 12, the data for static verbs is based on sentences 1, 3, 8, 9, the data for dynamic verbs is based on 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10.

Table 10. Contingency table for preposition/postposition of the argument and passive/impersonal constructions.

	PASS	IPS
Preposition	296	10
Postposition	255	65

Pearson's χ^2 test with Yates's continuity correction: X-squared = 81.839, df = 1, p -value < 2.2e-16

Table 11. Contingency table for verb tense and passive/impersonal constructions.

	PASS	IPS
Present	332	41
Past	219	34

Pearson's χ^2 test with Yates's continuity correction: X-squared = 0.63952, df = 1, p -value = 0.42

Table 12. Contingency table for type of the situation and passive/impersonal constructions.

	PASS	IPS
Stative context	213	38
Dynamic context	338	37

Pearson's χ^2 test with Yates's continuity correction: X-squared = 2.8225, df = 1, p -value = 0.09

The Pearson test results show that there is no statistically significant association between the choice of impersonal vs passive and verb tense (as p -value is 0.42) or the type of the situation (as p -value is 0.09), but there exists a statistically significant association between the choice of impersonal vs passive and the position of the nominative argument (as p -value 2.2e-16). The original sentence is more likely to be interpreted

as impersonal if the argument in nominative case stands after the predicate. This confirms the suggestion that the passive construction usually topicalizes an object (Siewierska 1986: 222), while in the impersonal object usually retains its position (Torn-Leesik 2016: 31).

In general, we can see that most of the forms (88% of the data) tend to be interpreted as passive. Despite the various parameters involved (tense, word order, stative/dynamic contexts), the results of this survey show that most of the sentences tested are perceived by the participants as containing passive constructions (i.e. when producing their negative counterparts the participants left the argument in the nominative case).⁹

The significant association between the position of the argument and the choice of impersonal strategy can be explained by the fact that the highest proportion of impersonal forms (57%, 43 out of 75) came in the responses to these two original sentences:

2. *Vahepeal oli Jakob saadetud õpetajaks Pandiveresse* ‘Meanwhile Jakob was sent as a teacher to Pandivere’: passive 46, impersonal 20.

9. *Tabelis on esitatud reaalkursi muutumine REER-i järgi* ‘In the table the change in the real exchange rate according to REER is shown’: passive 33, impersonal 23.

In these sentences, the argument is not preposed to the predicate. However, other sentences with the same word order do not show similar results. Thus, we can assume that other parameters also influence the correlation.¹⁰ One of these could be the animacy of the argument in the nominative (such as *Jakob* in sentence 2) – we can hypothesize that an animate argument is more likely to imply an impersonal interpretation, but this assumption needs to be checked in further studies.

Despite the predominance of passive forms in the results, it can be noticed that some participants in the experiment used impersonal forms more frequently. Among the 68 participants there were 5 who seemed to prefer using impersonal constructions. Altogether 26 of the 80 impersonal constructions recorded (including the answers with both variants)

9 Some of the negative counterparts provided by respondents involved a construction containing the *-mata* form (the supine in abessive case). These responses are not included in the results of the survey.

10 The information structure as factor influencing correlation was suggested by one of the reviewers. At first glance, there is no evidence for this correlation but further study is required.

were suggested by these 5 people; that is, 36% of impersonal forms were suggested by only 7% of respondents.

The sample data do not allow us to calculate the correlation between place of birth and the choice of impersonal forms. However, it was possible to calculate the correlation between the age of informants and the number of uses of impersonal forms. For this purpose, the Spearman correlation coefficient was used, as it is used to analyse samples deviating from a normal distribution. As a result, it was found that there was no correlation between age and the use of impersonal forms (p -value = 0.57 > 0.05, Spearman's rank correlation $\rho = 0.07$, where ρ close to 0 means lack of correlation). Therefore, we have no data to explain the preference for impersonal forms shown by some native speakers of Estonian, due to the small size of our sample.

5. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, we have examined “*to be* + passive participle” constructions in two Finnic languages, namely Veps and Estonian. For the analysis we used two different approaches: in Veps we analysed corpus data, while in Estonian we analysed the results of a survey carried out among native speakers.

The analysis of the Veps sample shows that the majority of constructions (66% of the collected data) cannot be unambiguously attributed to either the impersonal or the passive construction type. At the same time, there is a correlation between polarity and construction choice: passive constructions are more likely to occur in negative contexts, and impersonal constructions are more likely to occur in affirmative contexts. The corpus-based approach does not provide much opportunity to distinguish between the constructions in study. Nevertheless, the results we obtained using the corpus approach agree with the results obtained from the Estonian language survey.

In Estonian, we tried to find out whether native speakers can interpret which of the two constructions is being used in structurally ambiguous contexts – the impersonal or the passive. We started from the assumption that the same type of construction would be used in negative contexts as in affirmative contexts. The results of the survey show that 88% of the constructions are interpreted as passive. Tense of the verb form and static or dynamic semantics of the context do not correlate with

construction type, but there is an association between preverbal position of the nominative argument and the passive construction.

The results of the two studies suggest two alternative hypotheses.

The first hypothesis assumes that the choice of the impersonal or passive construction is caused by various factors, among which polarity is the most significant. That is, it is less probable that the impersonal construction will appear in a negative sentence. If we accept this hypothesis, then the prevalence of passive constructions in negative sentences in Veps is in line with our expectations.

The results of the Estonian survey also allow this interpretation. We reject the assumption that the construction type does not change when constructing the negative correlate to an affirmative sentence. Instead, we assume that constructing the negative correlate, native speakers switch from the impersonal to the passive construction, since the latter is more closely associated with negation.

A further examination of this hypothesis could involve comparing the ratio of affirmative and negative sentences for verbs used in the impersonal form (present or past tense) and for verbs used in the personal form (in the same tenses). If we find out that negative forms occur more rarely in impersonal sentences than in personal ones, this would be a strong argument in favour of this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis suggests that the argument in the impersonal construction has a specific or unusual status and is not a prototypical object any longer, instead displaying both object and subject features. In this case it is not possible to draw a strict border between impersonal and passive constructions, since the basic syntactic difference between them – whether the main argument is an object or a subject – is becoming blurred.

This hypothesis denies the assumption that impersonal constructions cannot be used with a nominative argument in negative sentences (this assumption is true only if the argument is a prototypical object). If we suppose that the argument has a mixed subject-object status, then we admit that the nominative argument can also appear in negative constructions, not only in affirmative ones.

Thus, the Veps negative constructions with nominative argument should not necessarily be taken as passive, meaning that the imbalance in distribution of the affirmative vs negative constructions identified here is illusory.

This hypothesis assumes that in the Estonian experiment the argument in impersonal negative constructions can have either nominative or partitive marking. The position of the argument on the scale from prototypical subject to prototypical object depends on various parameters. One of them, as shown by the experiment, is preposition/postposition of the argument with respect to the predicate (which is not surprising in view of Estonian's basic SVO word order).

This hypothesis would also explain the cases of argument-predicate number agreement given in Torn-Leesik (2009). The presence of a non-prototypical argument seems to be a more logical explanation than attributing object agreement to the Finnic languages.

In order to examine this hypothesis, we can propose a test that would check the frequency of arguments with different case marking in sentences with present and past impersonal constructions vs personal predicates. If the nominative/partitive argument frequency ratio is significantly higher in impersonal sentences than in personal sentences, this would support the hypothesis. Some evidence regarding this hypothesis was recently proposed in Liu (2023: 33–34). Also, in favour of this hypothesis would be the presence of nominative arguments in impersonal constructions which do not fulfil the semantic conditions that would require such arguments in personal constructions (for the principles of DOM in Finnic, see Section 2 of the introductory article to this volume).

Further research on these hypotheses would be a promising way of investigating passive vs impersonal distinction in Finnic languages.

List of abbreviations

ACT – active, ADE – adessive, ALL – allative, CNG – connegative, GEN – genitive, ILL – illative, IPS – impersonal, INF – infinitive, INE – inessive, NEG – negative particle, NOM – nominative, PART – partitive, PASS – passive, PL – plural, PRS – present tense, PST – past, PTCL – particle, PTCP – past participle, SG – singular, TRANS – translative, 3 – 3rd person

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Kokkuvõte. Polina Oskolskaia: Kas impersonaal või passiiv? Mõned lähenemised umbisikuliste konstruktsioonide analüüsile (vepsa ja eesti keele materjali põhjal). Artiklis käsitletakse „olla + passiivne partitiiv *-tud^s*“ konstruktsioone vepsa ja eesti keeles. Sõltuvalt süntaktilistest tingimustest võivad need konstruktsioonid olla impersonaalsed või passiivsed. Artiklis uuritakse neid olukordi, kus konteksti süntaktilised omadused ei võimalda täpselt

kindlaks teha, kas konstruktsioon on impersonaalne või passiivne. Tehakse ettepanek kaaluda kahte lähenemist selliste olukordade analüüsimiseks vepsa keele korpusuuringu ja eesti keele emakeelekõnelejate küsitluse analüüsi näitel. Vepsa andmete analüüs näitab, et 66% kogutud valimist ei saa üheselt seostada ei impersonaali ega passiivi konstruktsiooniga. Samal ajal esineb korrelatsioon polaarsuse ja konstruktsioonivaliku vahel: passiiv esineb sagedamini eitavates kontekstides ja impersonaal esineb sagedamini jaatavates kontekstides. Eesti keele uuringu tulemused näitavad, et 88% konstruktsioonidest tõlgendatakse passiivina. Verbi aeg ja statiivne / dünaamiline semantika ei korreleeru konstruktsioonitüübiga, kuid on olemas seos nominatiivse argumendi preverbaalse positsiooni ja passiivkonstruktsiooni vahel. Eeldati, et impersonaalses konstruktsioonis on argumendil eriline staatus ja see ei ole prototüüpne objekt, vaid sellel on nii objekti kui ka subjekti tunnused.

Märksõnad: impersonaal, passiiv, läänemeresoome keeled, vepsa keel, eesti keel, korpusuuring, süntaktiline homonüümia

Appendix: Impersonalized passives in the answers of respondents

We would also like to draw attention to three Estonian sentences that were not considered in the final survey results. These are 3 cases where impersonalized impersonal forms (see Section 2) are used. One of the examples is presented in (18):

- (18) *Eile* *õhtu-ks* *ei* *ol-dud* *põlengu-t*
 yesterday evening-TRANS NEG be-PTCP.PASS fire-PART
kustuta-tud
 extinguish-PTCP.PASS
 ‘The fire had not been extinguished by yesterday evening.’

The presence of an argument in the partitive case, *põlengut*, and a construction built from the auxiliary verb in impersonal form and passive participle allows us to categorize the form as an impersonalized impersonal. However, example (19) has an argument in the nominative, which makes it difficult to categorize the form at all, as in Vihman (2006: 165) these forms were considered entirely ungrammatical:

- (19) *Etendus* *ei* *ol-dud* *teh-tud*
 performance.NOM NEG be-PTCP.PASS do-PTCP.PASS
professionaalse-l *taseme-l*
 professional-ADE level-ADE
 ‘The performance wasn’t done at a professional level.’

Sentences with impersonalized impersonals do not differ in their semantics from passive sentences; they are not common but do appear in some responses. They can be assumed to result from blurring of the semantics of the impersonal and passive forms. It is possible that for native speakers the differences between these categories are becoming less clear. This observation also corresponds with Vihman’s (2002) conclusions on “semantic bleaching”.