

The components of Voice

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1 Introduction

General questions addressed in this talk

- What are the morphological, syntactic, and semantic components of Voice?
- Is Voice an elementary concept or a collection of properties?
- What similarities and differences can be found in the distribution of Voice across languages?

Theoretical context

- The notion(s) of Voice in a syntactic approach

- (1)
-
- ```
graph TD
 CP --> C
 CP --> IP
 IP --> I
 IP --> VD[Voice domain]
 VD --> Ellipsis1[...]
 VD --> V[... V ...]
```
- Similar to the inflectional clausal domain (IP) (tense, aspect, agreement), a decomposition has also been suggested for the thematic domain (extended VP).
  - The composition of the domain between the lowest inflectional head and the lexical verb is the subject of this talk.

*Goals and main conclusions*

- Comparison of active/passive and Austronesian Voice systems  
→ There are major differences, but also important parallels.
- Decomposed notion of Voice  
→ The uniform stable properties of Voice relate to the Agent (aka Actor, Initiator); variation arises in the morphosyntactic Voice properties.
- Evidence for a decomposed structural organization of Voice  
→ Configurations where one component is missing (*lassen* passive) or the parts occur in different clauses (Voice restructuring).

## 2 Two types of Voice systems

### 2.1 Active/passive systems

(2) Der Salat wurde (von den Vögeln) mit großer Freude gefressen.

- Object promotion to subject
- Understood Agent (“someone”), optionally oblique
- Passive auxiliary, and participle morphology on verb

### 2.2 Austronesian Voice<sup>1</sup>

- The Austronesian Voice system involves marking on the verb and promotion of an argument (including functions such as locative or benefactive).
- The type of verbal marking indicates which argument (actor, patient ...) is promoted.
- Debates:
  - What kind of promotion? Promotion to subject, topic, both?
  - What kind of trigger? Case, ergativity, topichood, a mix thereof?
  - Terminology: *Voice*, *Topic*, *Focus*—Actor Voice/Topic/Focus (AV/AT/AF); Patient/Object Voice (OV/PV). I will use PV, for cases where the direct object is promoted.

(3) Acehnese

- |    |                                                                                                |               |              |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| a. | <i>Uleue nyan di-kap lôn.</i><br>snake DEM 3FAM-bite 1SG<br>‘The snake bit me.’                | Active        | [?: 4, (1a)] |
| b. | <i>Lôn di-kap lé uleue nyan.</i><br>1SG 3FAM-bite by snake DEM<br>‘I was bitten by the snake.’ | Passive       | [?: 4, (1b)] |
| c. | <i>Lôn uleue nyan kap.</i><br>1SG snake DEM bite<br>‘I was bitten by the snake.’               | Patient Voice | [?: 5, (1c)] |

There are systematic differences between Passive and PV (within Acehnese and in general).

- Passive is comparable to Indo-European-type passive:
  - The Agent is an oblique/PP (see Legate 2012, ? for evidence that the *le* phrase is a PP).
  - The oblique Agent is optional.
  - When no oblique is present, the Agent is interpreted existentially.

(4) *Aneuk nyan di-kap (lé uleue nyan).*  
child DEM 3FAM-bite (LE snake DEM)  
‘The child was bitten (by the snake).’ [?: 26, (45)]

<sup>1</sup>This section is based on ? and discussions with her.

- PV shares some properties with active, some with passive:
  - The **object** is promoted (~ passive).
  - The **subject** is *not* demoted (~ active) (in some languages, it cliticizes onto Voice, but in others, such as Acehnese, it can be a full DP).
  - The **Agent** DP or clitic is obligatory (~ active).
  - The **Agent** is a true argument (~ active)

- (5) a. *Lôn uleue nyan kap.*  
 1SG snake DEM bite  
 ‘I was bitten by the snake.’ [?: 5, (1c)]
- b. *Aneuk nyan \*(uleue nyan) kap.*  
 child DEM \*(snake DEM) bite  
 ‘The child was bitten (by the snake).’ [?: 69, (124b)]

- Imperatives:
  - Subject argument is implicit.
  - PV: an implicit Agent can bind an object reflexive.
  - Passive: passive imperatives are impossible in some languages (but not all); implicit Agent cannot bind an object reflexive.

- (6) Indonesian
- a. *Salah-kan dirimu.*  
 PV.wrong-CAUS SELF.2  
 ‘Blame yourself.’ [?: 60, (48a)]
- b. *\*Di-salah-kan diri-mu.*  
 PASS-wrong-CAUS SELF.2  
 ‘Blame yourself.’ [?: 60, (48b)]

- Binding differences:
  - The moved object can be bound by the Agent in PV, but not in passive.
  - The object cannot be treated as a mere A' element, since, in contrast to passive Agents, it can control (?) and be controlled (?).

- (7) Indonesian
- a. *?\*Dirinya di-serahkan ke Polisi oleh Amir*  
 SELF.3 PASS-surrender to police by Amir  
 Lit. ‘Himself was surrendered to the police by Amir.’  
 ‘I was surrendered by myself to the police.’ [?: 4, (6a)]
- b. *Diri-saya saya serahkan ke polisi*  
 SELF-1 1SG surrender to police  
 ‘I surrendered myself to the police.’ [?: 7, (16a)]

## 2.3 Summary

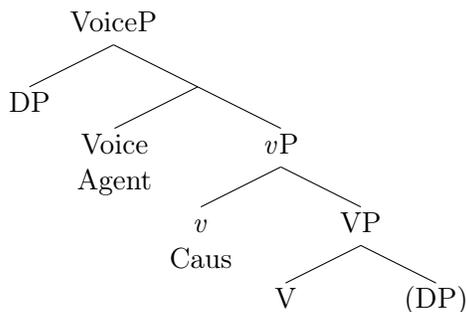
| Property         | Passive                              | PV                                            |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Object promotion | promotion to subject                 | promotion to highest argument, topic argument |
| Agent            | existentially closed or oblique      | argument                                      |
| Voice morphology | auxiliary common (but not necessary) | agglutinating, possibly zero                  |

## 3 Decomposed Voice (domain)

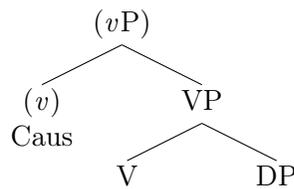
### 3.1 Decomposed Voice domain

- Split Voice domain: separating Voice, Caus, verbalizer, Applicative, possibly others.
- See, among others, [Bowers 2002](#), [Pylkkänen 2002, 2008](#), [Folli and Harley 2005](#), [Alexiadou et al. 2006](#), [Marantz 2008](#), [Schäfer 2008](#), [Harley 2009, 2017](#), [Pitteroff and Alexiadou 2012](#), [Pitteroff 2014](#).
- Language variation: Bundling of Agent and CAUS properties into a single head.

(8) Transitive, unergative



Unaccusative, anti-causative



*Back to the familiarity marker in Acehnese*

- The familiarity marker is a Voice element which tracks the **Agent**, not the subject.
- It has the same distribution as **Agent Voice**:
  - It occurs below modals, negation, aspect.
  - It does not appear with unaccusatives or non-verbal predicates.
  - It occurs above the causative.

(9) a. \**Lôn lôn-kap lé uleue nyan.*

1SG 1SG-bite by snake DEM  
‘I was bitten by the snake.’

[?: 10, (6)]

b. *Hasan geu-peu-reubah aneuk miet nyan.*

Hasan 3POL-CAUS-fall child small DEM  
‘Hasan caused the child to fall.’

[?: 29, (50a)]

Language variation

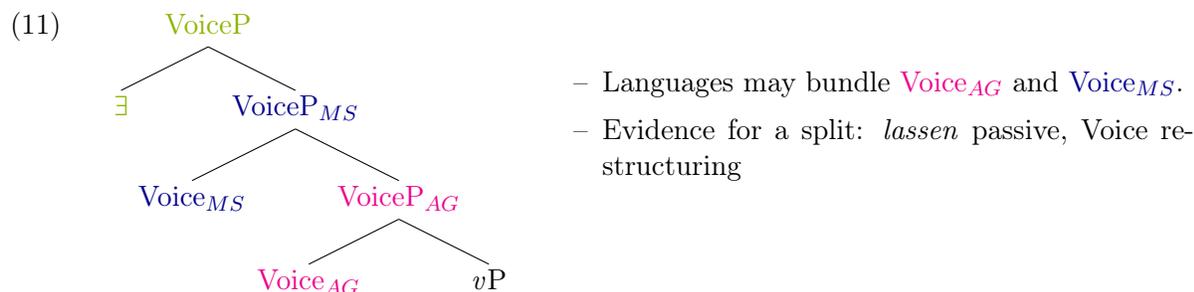
(10) Harley 2017 (16, (24)):

- a. Voice-bundling language:
  - (i) has relationship between verbalizing morphology and Agent introduction
  - (ii) can have relationship between internal case checking and Agent introduction
  - (iii) has a single position of exponence for verbalizing, causativizing, inchoative, and “passivizing” morphology.
- b. Voice-splitting language:
  - (i) has agglutinating (“stacking”) passive morphology
  - (ii) can have high applicatives
  - (iii) can show causative morphology in the absence of a syntactic Causer argument.

Relevant point to take away: There is a functional head **Voice** which associates the VP/*v*P with an argument position corresponding to an **Agent** (or similar thematic relation).

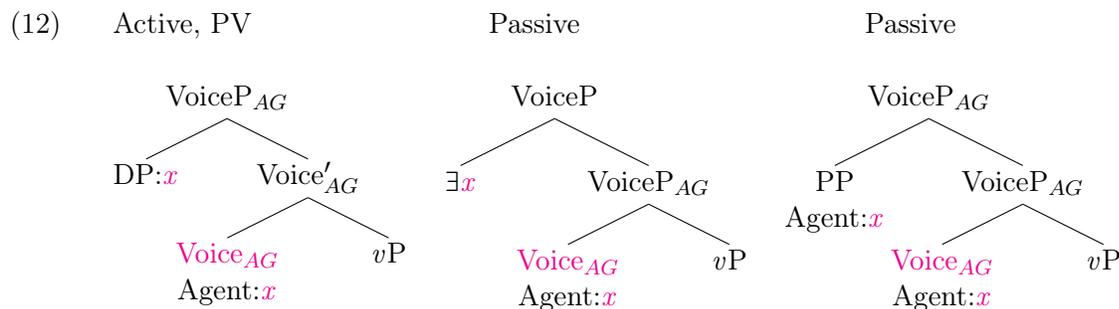
### 3.2 Decomposed Voice

- Components of Voice (based on the passive proposals in Embick 2004, Bruening 2013):
  - **Voice<sub>AG</sub>**: introduces an **Agent** argument position (not necessarily an Agent argument).
  - **Voice<sub>MS</sub>**: introduces morpho-syntactic Voice properties (such as passive morphology, Case).
  - **Existential closure**: after completion of the voice domain, open variables are existentially closed.



### 3.3 Unifying the two Voice systems

- **Voice<sub>AG</sub>** is present in (non-unaccusative) active, passive, and PV.
- Differences arise in the way the Agent argument slot is saturated: DP, existential closure, oblique

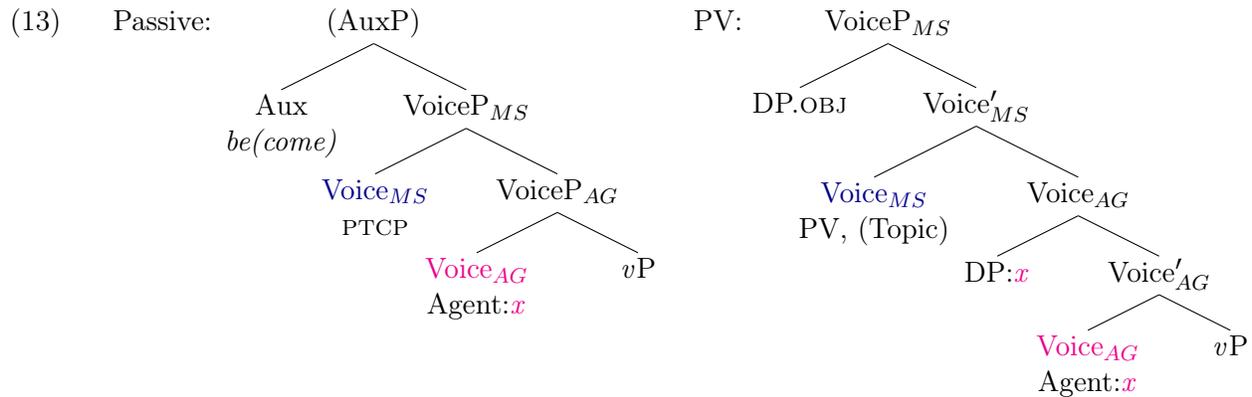


*Aside—Case*

- In both passive and PV, the object is promoted and it is usually assumed that it does not receive structural object case.
- The lack of objective case (ACC) in passive is typically associated with the lack of a DP Agent argument, which cannot directly be applied in PV contexts.
- A unified approach is nevertheless possible if the mixed nature of PV (no objective case, but a non-oblique DP argument), is assumed to follow from a special lexical case for the Agent DP in PV (??).
- In a *Dependent Case* approach, oblique and lexically case-marked arguments do not qualify as case competitors, which excludes assignment of dependent case to the object.

Voice<sub>MS</sub> is the main locus for variation.

- Passive Voice<sub>MS</sub> (Embick 2004 AspP, Bruening 2013 PassP):
  - selects a non-saturated Voice<sub>AG</sub>
  - participle morphology
  - may be selected by a further higher auxiliary head.
- PV Voice<sub>MS</sub>:
  - selects a saturated Voice<sub>AG</sub>
  - may also contain additional information such as Topic (see Pearson 2005)
  - prominent argument may move to the specifier (Rackowski and Richards 2005)



| Property         | Passive                              | PV                                            |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Object promotion | promotion to subject                 | promotion to highest argument, topic argument |
| Agent            | existentially closed or oblique      | argument                                      |
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- Possible direction regarding Voice morphology: Bundling of Voice<sub>AG</sub> and Voice<sub>MS</sub>.

## 4 Evidence for split Voice

### 4.1 *Lassen* passive

- *Lassen* ‘let/make’ passive: the embedded subject can be dropped (German does not allow dropped non-topic subjects otherwise).
- *Lassen* middles: *lassen* occurs with the reflexive *sich*; the **object is promoted** to matrix subject.
- *Lassen* middles share some properties with canonical middles, but [Pitteroff 2014](#) shows in detail that there are also differences (e.g., the adverb is not required).
- In both constructions, the matrix verb is active causative *lassen*; the embedded verb is also morphologically active.

- (14) a. *Er ließ ø die Fensterscheibe putzen.*  
He let ø the window.glass clean  
‘He let/made someone clean the window.’  
*lassen* passive  
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (4a)]
- b. *Die Fensterscheibe lässt sich leicht putzen.*  
The window.glass lets itself easily clean  
‘The window cleans easily.’  
*lassen* middles  
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (4b)]

- Embedded passive is impossible in both constructions.

- (15) a. \**Er ließ die Fensterscheibe geputzt (werden).*  
He let the window.glass cleaned (become)  
Intended: ‘He let the window be cleaned.’  
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (5a)]
- b. \**Die Fensterscheibe lässt sich leicht geputzt (werden).*  
The window.glass lets itself easily cleaned (become)  
Intended: ‘It is easy for the window to be cleaned.’  
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 223, (5b)]

- Nevertheless, despite the impossible passive morphology, both *lassen* passive and *lassen* middles show the properties of embedded syntactic passive.
- **Oblique Agents** are possible.

- (16) a. *Das Buch liest sich (\*von kleinen Kindern) gut.*  
The book reads itself (\***by little children**) well  
‘The book reads well (\*by little children).’  
Canonical middle  
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 46, (40a)]
- b. *Das Buch lässt sich (von kleinen Kindern) gut lesen.*  
The book lets itself (**by little children**) well read.  
‘The book can be read easily (by small children).’  
*lassen* middle  
[[Pitteroff 2014](#): 47, (41a)]
- c. *Der Mann lässt von dem Handwerker die Türe öffnen.*  
The man lets **by the craftsman** the door open  
‘The man makes the craftsman open the door.’  
*lassen* passive  
[[Pitteroff 2014](#):77, (44)]

- Verbal passive (vs. adjectival passive) typically triggers a disjoint reference effect with the promoted object (a “not-self” implicature?).

- (17) a. *Die Kinder wurden gekämmt.*  
 The children became combed  
 (i) Someone other than the children combed the children.  
 (ii) \*The children combed the children. Verbal passive  
[Pitteroff 2014: 89, (74a)]
- b. *Die Kinder waren gekämmt.*  
 The children were combed  
 (i) Someone other than the children combed the children.  
 (ii) The children combed the children. Adjectival passive  
[Pitteroff 2014: 90, (74b)]

- Both *lassen* passive and *lassen* middles show the same disjoint reference effect.

- (18) a. *Die Mutter ließ die Kinder kämmen.*  
 The mother lets the children comb  
 (i) The mother made someone comb the children.  
 (ii) \*The mother made the children comb themselves. *lassen* passive  
[Pitteroff 2014: 90, (76a)]
- b. *Dieses Kind lässt sich (leicht) kämmen.*  
 This child lets itself (easily) comb  
 (i) Someone other than the child can comb the child easily.  
 (ii) \*It is easy for the child to comb itself. *lassen* middle  
[Pitteroff 2014: 107, (35a)]

- The embedded predicate must be a causative (which can be passivized), and cannot be an inchoative (which cannot be passivized).

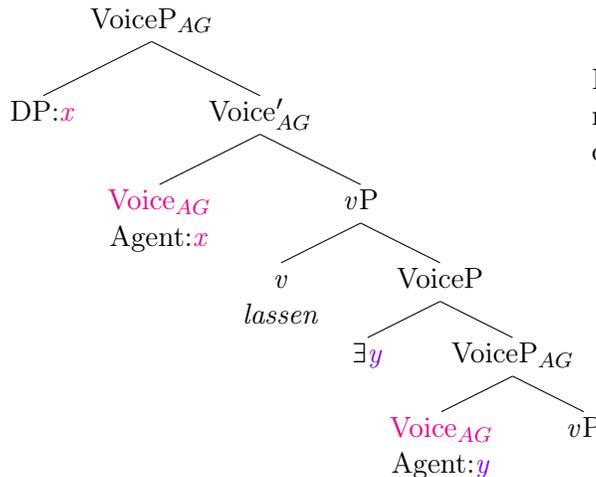
- (19) a. *Dieses Schiff lässt sich leicht versenken / \*versinken.*  
 This ship lets itself easily sink.CAUS / \*sink.INCH  
 “This ship can be sunk easily.” *lassen* middle  
[Pitteroff 2014: 111, (44a)]
- b. *Der Pate lässt das Schiff von seinen Handlangern versenken / \*versinken.*  
 The godfather lets the ship by his henchmen sink.CAUS / \*sink.INCH  
*lassen* passive  
[Pitteroff 2014:233, (27a)]

### *Relevance and analysis*

- The embedded predicate shows all hallmark properties of passive, except the morphology.
- Things fall in place when we separate *Voice<sub>AG</sub>* and *Voice<sub>MS</sub>*.
- Following Pitteroff 2014, *lassen* passive/middles involve an embedded passive *Voice<sub>AG</sub>*—i.e., an unsaturated *VoiceP<sub>AG</sub>* without an Agent argument DP.
- In contrast to “regular” passive, *VoiceP<sub>MS</sub>* is omitted, e.g., as a form of restructuring.

- When the embedded thematic cycle is complete, existential closure applies (unless a PP Agent is merged).
- The verb is realized as a default infinitive, since there is no  $Voice_{MS}$  to specify a value.

(20) *Lassen* passive



Passive syntax/semantics ( $Voice_{AG}$  and  $\exists$ ) needs to be separated from passive morphology ( $VoiceP_{MS}$ ).

## 4.2 Voice restructuring

### 4.2.1 Phenomena and distribution

- A range of languages allow constructions in which an embedded argument is promoted to matrix subject.
- long object promotion [LOP].
- Evidence for LOP: Case, agreement, language specific A-movement properties.

(21)  $DP.NOM$   $Voice.PASS/PV$  [  $Voice.DEFAULT/PASS/PV$   $DP.OBJ$  ]

*Three types of constructions which differ in the morphological patterns and the origin of the subject*

- Default Voice: Acehnese, Amis, Croatian, Czech, European Portuguese, German, Italian, Japanese, Kannada, Kavalan, Matu'uwal Atayal, Paiwan, Puyuma, Saaroa, Sediq, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish, Takibakha Bunun
- Embedded verb realizes the default morphological form (see [Wurmbrand and Shimamura 2017](#) for evidence).

(22) Infinitive default

*As casas foram abacadas de construir em 1950.*  
 the houses were finished to build in 1950  
 'They finished to build the houses in 1950.'

European Portuguese  
 [[Cinque 2002](#): 5, (7a)]

- (23) AV default
- a. *naqaru-un i t-um-uting ni yumin ku bawaq*  
 finish-[PV] LNK beat-[AV]-beat GEN Yumin NOM pig  
 ‘Yumin finished beating/killing the pigs.’  
 Matu’uwal Atayal  
 [Chen 2010: 5/19, (8a)/(38c)]
- b. \**naqaru-un i tuting-un ni yumin ku bawaq*  
 finish-[PV] LNK beat-[PV] GEN Yumin NOM pig  
 ‘Yumin finished beating/killing the pigs.’  
 [Chen 2010: 11, (25b)]

• Voice Matching: Isbukun Bunun, Saisiyat, Tsou

- (24) a. *Iliskinun-ku bunbun-a tu baliv-un.*  
 want-[PV]-1.SG.ACC banana-that.NOM TU buy-[PV]  
 Lit. ‘The bananas are wanted to be bought by me.’  
 ‘I wanted to buy the bananas.’ Isbukun Bunun [Wu 2013: 40, (10b)]
- b. Non-matching combinations impossible

• Crossed Control: Balinese, Chamorro, Madurese, Sundanese (I. Paul, J. Vander Klok, p.c.); Indonesian, Javanese, Malagasy, Tagalog, Tongan, Tukang Besi, Samoan (Polinsky and Potsdam 2008)

- (25) Crossed Control = CC (Regular control = RC) Indonesian
- a. *Anak mau [kamu ø-peluk. ]*  
 child want [ 2.SG [PV]-hug ]  
 RC: ‘The child wants to be hugged by you.’  
 CC: ‘You want to hug the child.’ [Berger 2019: 62, (9)]
- b. *Kucing-nya coba [ di-cium oleh Esti. ]*  
 cat-3.SG try [ [PASS]-kiss by Esti ]  
 RC: ‘Her cat tried to be kissed by Esti.’  
 CC: ‘Esti tried to kiss her cat.’ [Sato and Kitada 2012: (27)]

*Distribution of (im)possible combinations (Davies 2014, Kurniawan 2013, Natarina 2018)*

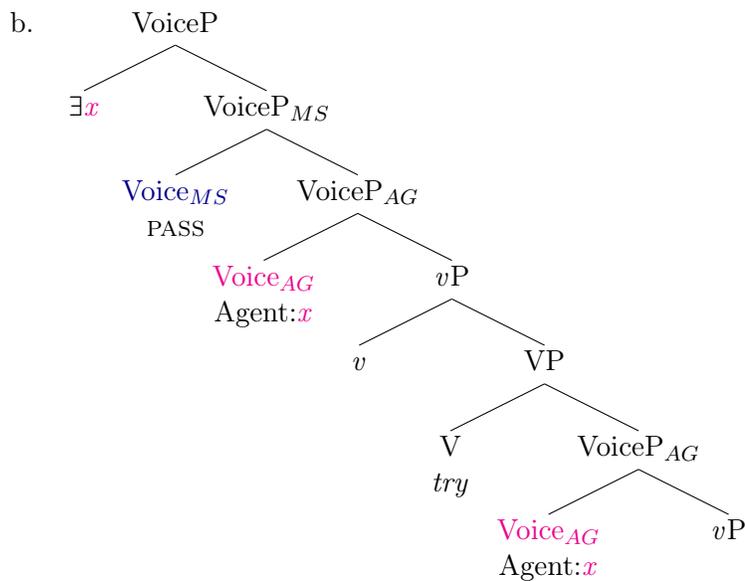
|    | V1         | V2         | Agent high          | Agent low                                 |
|----|------------|------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| A. | bare       | PV         | n/a                 | Indonesian, Balinese, Sundanese, Madurese |
| B. | bare       | PASS       | n/a                 | Indonesian, Balinese                      |
| C. | PASS       | PASS       | Norwegian           | Chamorro, Indonesian                      |
| D. | PV         | PV         | Isbukun Bunun       | Sundanese, Madurese                       |
| E. | PASS       | default    | German, Japanese... | n/a                                       |
| F. | PV         | default AV | Mayrinax Atayal     | n/a                                       |
| G. | PASS       | PV         | ??                  | *                                         |
| H. | default AV | PASS/PV    | n/a                 | *                                         |

*For details:* Ileana Paul, Lisa Travis, Jozina Vander Klok, Susi Wurmbrand. Crossed control as Voice restructuring. *Annual Meeting of the Canadian Linguistic Association* (this Friday).

## 4.2.2 Back to Voice

- Important property of Voice restructuring: the matrix and embedded Agents are shared.
- But syntactically, there is only one argument (either in the matrix or the embedded clause, depending on the type).
- For the view on Voice here, this means that there cannot be existential closure in the embedded clause.

(26) a. *Zu reparieren wurde nur der Wagen versucht.*  
 To repair was only the.NOM car tried.  
 ‘They only tried to repair the car.’



## 5 Conclusion

- The concept of Voice
- What are the morphological, syntactic, and semantic components of Voice?  
 → Voice comprises of the semantic introduction of an Agent argument and language-specific morphological properties. These properties can correspond to distinct syntactic heads, as evidenced by configurations in which one of the components is missing or located in a higher domain.
- Is Voice an elementary concept or a collection of properties?  
 → A collection of properties, which may be syntactically distinct or bundled in one position. It needs to be further investigated if these options correspond to different types of Voice systems.
- What similarities and differences can be found in the distribution of Voice across languages?  
 → The Agent property is manifested cross-linguistically in passive and PV, whereas morphosyntactic properties such as verbal inflection and Case show variation.

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