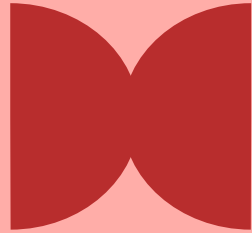


Passives

Pearl 2023

JoCL 2.2



Kaitlin Lee

What is the passive tense?

The passive structure is a sentence that focuses on the action and the object, rather than the subject.

The passive structure in English allows the subject to be a PATIENT
(Pearl 2023)

EXAMPLE:

The toy kitten was broken by Lindy.

EXAMPLE:

The toy kitten was broken by Lindy.

Toy kitten = being broken

Lindy = the breaker

Sentences are structured so that the subject of the sentence needs to have a position marked behind the verb.

The toy kitten was broken [*The toy kitten*] by Lindy

Children need to learn:

- a) *This interpretation is possible*
- b) *The subject serves as **Patient***

Note: Not all verbs passivize

*The toy kitten was fallen.

So kids have to learn which verbs in English can passivize and which can't.

When do children learn to passivize?

Depends with certain verbs. For example, verb meaning may impact it.

I.e. “Hug” vs “Love”

“Lindy was hugged by Mike” versus “Lindy was loved by Mike.”

Verbs that are observable are easier for children to learn are passivizable.

Q: Does embodiment help children learn verb tense?

Transitivity can be a key indicator
that a verb can be passivized.

A transitive syntactic context has a subject and direct object

“Lindy broke the toy kitten”

Lindy = subject

the toy kitten = direct object

Nguyen and Pearl proposed that children learn a verb is passivizable based on two things:

1. Lexical semantic features (being able to be observed)
2. How often verbs with specific features are passivized

Using prior knowledge, children can extract information from any particular verb

- proof: children may find it difficult or easy to deploy the passive, because they lack data on how the passive structure is formed
 - Fitting the observed data is about how much child input is there
 - Knowledge about verb's features and frequencies of those features in passive forms

Acquisition Theory

Nguyen & Pearl (2019)

Information integrated and selective learning

Bayesian inference = learning / knowledge

Assumption that both syntactic and non-syntactic information is revelation and combined

Nguyen & Pearl Model

Model learned from verb usage in English child-directed speech

“The toy kitten was broken.”

“The toy kitten broke.”

Age of Acquisition: when children have been observed to correctly interpret or produce the passive of a verb more than half the time

Model in Nguyen and Pearl

1. Model age: Using AoA (age 5) as model target
2. Stimuli: 30 verbs whose AoA was 5 or younger vs AoA was older
3. The modeled learner predicts a specific verb is either passivizable or not at a certain age, on the basis of its input.

Conclusion

Modeled 5-yr-old learned from distribution of verb input and predicted passivizable verbs

A model who ignored most available features and instead focused on transitivity and single lexical feature could recreate the behavior of english-learning 5 yo

Which suggests that five year olds attend to syntactic and lexical semantic features in their input and learn from this to learn how to passivize