Passive and perspective

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...sive construction in Dutch represents a long-standing ... both in linguistics and in written communications. This ... oposes a new analysis of the passive in Dutch, ... g insights from theoretical (especially cognitive) ... s and rhetoric/composition.

... t of departure is the observation that the Dutch passive ... demonstrable perspective effect in texts: the passive ... ges identification with the agent, and this in fact is the ... of the Dutch passive construction. This meaning forms ... s for a solution to a number of text problems, including ... em of how to best use the passive in computer manuals.

... also understand the passive's role in specific texts. For ... it becomes clear why policy paper writers use so many ... Finally, in one of the case studies it is shown why ... were used differently in the NRC Handelsblad, a ... daily newspaper, and in the Parool, from Amsterdam, ... ey both reported that Ajax, Amsterdam's football team, ... he national soccer champion.

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USL&C   UTRECHT STUDIES IN LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

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(1) In dit voorwoord *wordt terecht "bedankt" gezegd door mij, maar...*
     In this preface, it *is rightly said "thank you" by me, but ...*

... especially Chapters 4 and 6 will show that (1) is an awkward way to do so. A better way is: I would like to thank all those who contributed to the process towards this book's final state.

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Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think.
Dhammapada 1.1

Contents

1. Introducing the search for passive and perspective

In this chapter, I will introduce the research questions that this book aims to answer: what is the function of the Dutch passive in texts, and how can we understand the passive's 'perspective effects' on the basis of that function (or those functions)? First of all, I will show that the passive can have certain perspective effects by discussing an example from a literary text (1.1). In 1.2, I will show that the research question is relevant not only for our understanding of the passive's effects in literary texts, which are sometimes extreme, but also for composition, writing advice and document design: the current treatment of the passive in those fields leads to a dilemma because it is not clear where and how the passive can be used, and where it is better avoided. In order to solve the problems arising out of this dilemma, the analysis of the passive in this book should lead to an understanding of the passive and its discourse function(s) in the kinds of text in which the passive occurs, and perhaps especially in those in which that occurrence may be (seen as) problematic. The research question also has a more theoretical relevance: the aim is to integrate the findings on the discourse function of the passive with those on its grammar and/or semantics. This book is not just about the passive's discourse function, but also about the passive as a linguistic construction. In other words: we will not only look at what the passive *does*, but also at what it *is*. In fact, the two aspects cannot be separated or even distinguished, as will become clear in the chapters to come.

In 1.3, I will introduce some basic terminology, notions such as 'passive', 'agent' and 'patient', including some problematic terms, such as 'perspective'. The problems justify a closer look at terminology. We will take such a closer look in the subsequent chapters, in particular in Chapter 2. At the end of 1.3, we will have the terminology to begin discussing the passive. 1.4 outlines the chapters and introduces some principles of this book, including the corpus and text material used.

1.1 KINDERJAREN

The short novel *Kinderjaren* by Jona Oberski describes the life of a child during World War II and the post-war period through the eyes of this child, the story's narrator and *I*. During the war, the child loses contact with his mother. He finds

her back again after the war, in a hospital, where she is ill. The following fragment (also used in Onrust, Verhagen and Doeve 1993:105-107 and quoted from there) describes how they meet again:

(1) 'Dat is geen drinkwater. Jij wilt mij zeker dood hebben, hè?' werd er uit het bed geschreeuwd. Trude nam zelf een slok en zette de beker bij het bed. Zij zei dat nu de pillen geslikt moesten worden.

De deken werd op het bed gelegd. De haren bleven naar alle kanten wijzen. Ze hingen ook voor het gezicht.

'Als ik doodga is het jullie schuld,' krijste de stem achter de haren. De pillen verdwenen in de mond die ik bijna niet zien kon en het water werd gedronken.

'Het zijn mijn aardappels. Ik moet ze terug hebben,' werd er geschreeuwd.

Trude liep naar de vrouw en sprak even met haar. Zij beloofde dat zij haar nieuwe aardappels zou brengen. De vrouw haalde haar schouders op en zei: 'Ze is gek'. Ik riep naar Trude dat het tasje onder het bed lag. Zij pakte het en legde het op het andere bed. Het tasje werd gepakt en er werd in gekeken. Toen verdween er een hand in het tasje. Hij kwam eruit met een aardappel. De aardappel werd bekeken. Het tasje werd omgekeerd op het bed. De hand met de aardappel werd opgetild en naar de muur bewogen. De vrouw die ons geholpen had schreeuwde 'pas op' en pakte haar kussen. De aardappel raakte haar midden in haar gezicht.

'That water's not fit to drink. You want me dead, don't you?' it was shouted from the bed. Trude took a sip herself and put the cup down by the bed. She said the pills had to be taken now.

The blanket was laid on the bed. The hairs kept pointing in all directions. They also hung in front of the face.

'If I die it will be your fault', screamed the voice behind the hairs. The pills disappeared in the mouth I could barely see and the water was drunk.

'They are my potatoes. I must have them back', it was shouted.

Trude walked towards the woman and talked to her a while. She promised that she would bring new potatoes. The woman shrugged her shoulders and said: 'She is mad'. I called out to Trude that the bag was under the bed. She took it up and laid it down on the other bed. The bag was taken up and it was looked into. Then a hand disappeared into the bag. It came out with a potato. The potato was observed. The bag was turned around on the bed. The hand with the potato was lifted and moved towards the wall. The woman who had helped us shouted 'watch out' and grabbed her pillow. The potato hit her in the middle of her face.[1]

It becomes clear from the fragment that the mother is not only physically ill, but

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1. Note that the English translation of this fragment of *Kinderjaren* (in *Childhood*, translated by Ralph Manheim; 1983:99-100) is rather different: hardly any passives are used at all.

also mentally: her behaviour is strange. From the way the events are described, we can tell that the child finds it difficult to recognize his mother and that he feels alienated from her. Several linguistic means contribute to this impression of alienation that the text gives. For example, articles are used rather than personal pronouns when the mother is described: it is *de stem* ('the voice'), *de mond* ('the mouth') and *de haren* ('the hairs').

One of the other means by which the text's alienating effect is achieved is the use of the passive. In the small fragment, ten passives are used:

(2) werd geschreeuwd
    geslikt moesten worden
    werd gelegd
    werd gedronken
    werd geschreeuwd
    werd gepakt
    werd gekeken
    werd bekeken
    werd omgekeerd
    werd opgetild en bewogen

The implicit 'agent' or 'actor' or 'logical subject' or 'external argument' of all of these passives is clearly the mother. She is somehow present in all of the actions described with these passives, but implicit and not quite 'visible'. The passives seem to indicate a certain perspective: it is only through the eyes of the child and assuming a certain world view (i.e. that of the child) that we can understand them, and they seem to express a certain distance or lack of identification between the child (the narrator using the passives) and the mother. Through the passive, the narrator expresses alienation. What exactly is it about the passive that makes such an effect possible?

Alienation, distance, identification and perspective are not the most commonly encountered terms when the passive and its discourse functions are discussed. Rather, as we will see in the next chapter, we often find backgrounding, demotion, non-centrality, etc. Clearly, in the fragment from *Kinderjaren* the mother is somehow 'demoted, backgrounded, non-central': when we look through the eyes of the child, the mother (the agent of the passive) is somehow there, but not central, not as central as mothers usually are when seen through the eyes of their children. However, although she is 'not central', she figures prominently in the text. The aim of this research is to specify how 'actors' can be demoted, backgrounded and non-central, despite being prominently present in several ways, and how the passive's demotion, backgrounding and non-centrality are related to perspective and identification.

1.2 AVOID THE PASSIVE? A DILEMMA

Another term we often find when the use of the passive in texts is discussed is 'avoid': in literature on composition, writing and texts, it is often recommended that the passive be avoided. The passive does not have a very good reputation: passive sentences are said to be stiff, formal, difficult, and to give rise to an 'ugly' style (for an overview of negative remarks on the style and register with respect to the passive, see Vandenbosch 1992:58/59 and the references therein). For example, Bolinger (1980:86) states that the passive can be 'one of the worst plagues of irresponsible journalism'. Passives, therefore, are a little like weeds: just as weeds are pulled out of the garden, passives should be pulled out of a text. And just as weeds can have nice flowers, it is sometimes recognized that the passive may have a positive side as well: it can have a function of its own. Even Bolinger admits this: 'the most useful - and dangerous - function of the passive is to enable the speaker to keep silent about who performs the action: *The cars are loaded here* says nothing about who does it - which is fine if who does it is not important, but misleading if it is, unless something else fills us in' (p. 29). Bolinger's ambivalence about the usefulness of the passive is typical: the passive can be used well, but it should also be avoided. Although it is easy to look at a weed and to decide whether you like the flowers or not, it is not as easy to decide in which cases the passive should be allowed to flower. In other words, it is not clear when the passive should be avoided, and when it can be put to good use in a text.

The idea that the passive should be avoided is partly based on intuitions, but also on psycholinguistic research, especially from the 1960s. In this first grand decade of Chomsky's transformational generative grammar, psycholinguists tried to find evidence for the existence of transformations. It was argued that if a construction took more time to be produced or comprehended, this extra time was necessary to perform a transformation from the underlying deep structure to the surface form (or vice versa). The passive was one of those transformations, and it was found that passive clauses indeed took longer to process than did their active counterparts (see for example Mehler 1963, Slobin 1966). It was further argued, therefore, that the passive was more difficult and complex, and that it should be avoided in texts in order to facilitate processing and comprehension.

However, other psycholinguistic research from the 1960s onwards showed that the passive is not always more difficult to understand or process. Wright (1969), for example, showed that in certain contexts the passive was in fact easier to produce and comprehend than its active counterpart. These experiments provided backing for the part of the advice that stresses the passive's usefulness: the passive can be used well to foreground the subject of the clause (the 'logical object' or patient). In this way the passive can create a topic chain and link sentences to one another, especially when the sentence or paragraph is about the patient. On the other hand,

the passive also serves to background the agent. The backgrounding of the agent is seen both as an argument for and against the use of the passive. Those arguing against it warn against the vagueness and the avoidance of responsibility the passive may cause. If something *has to be organized*, for example, it is not clear by whom and it is not possible to say who is responsible for the organizing.

We now have a clear dilemma: on the one hand, the passive can be used well to background the agent or to foreground the patient, but it should not be used too often, because this makes the text formal, stiff, difficult, incoherent, and vague. Put another way, the passive should not be used too often, but it can and sometimes should be used, for example in order to avoid mentioning the agent. The dilemma arises when a writer wants to take both parts of this advice seriously: putting the passive to its good ('functional') use (for example in order to avoid *I* and *we* or other agents), but not overusing it.

To sum up: it is not clear when we should avoid and when we should use the passive, or, more specifically: in which texts and contexts which passives are better avoided. Some authors leave this to the taste or sensitivity of the writer (for example Jansen *et al.* 1989:144). Others do not even mention the problem. Most Dutch text and composition (advice) books show symptoms of this dilemma (for example Renkema 1989, Overduin 1986, Steehouder *et al.* 1992, to name but a few of the most frequently used books). They often sum up the possible uses of the passive (Renkema 1989:95/96 lists six), yet warn against using it too often. If a writer were to use the passive in all of Renkema's six cases (agent unknown, mentioning the agent not informative, agent is the author and *I* is to be avoided, agent should not be emphasized, patient is topic, active is ambiguous), he or she would be likely to end up with a text with many passives. How many passives is too many, and how can a writer determine which uses of the passive are functional in his or her own text?

The passive is not only frequently used in certain kinds of text, but is also used in many different kinds of text and in many different ways. In (1), the passive is used as a literary, stylistic means to create the effect of alienation.[2] In (3), taken from the corpus of Renkema (1981), on the other hand, the passive is used in a more formal way, with a certain argumentative direction or force.

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2. Note that it would have been absurd to say that Oberski should have avoided the use of so many passives in *Kinderjaren*.

(3) Dat de regering ondanks de bovengenoemde bezwaren een positief standpunt heeft ingenomen ten aanzien van de oprichting van het fonds vindt zijn oorzaak in de volgende overwegingen.

Het wordt voor de Nederlandse economie van het grootste belang geacht dat andere geïndustrialiseerde landen [...] via het fonds kunnen worden bijgestaan, zodat zij niet worden gedwongen hun toevlucht te nemen tot schuldenmoratoria en handelsbeperkende maatregelen. Verondersteld wordt voorts dat alleen al het bestaan van een "vangnet" als het onderhavige ertoe zal bijdragen dat de internationale financiële wereld haar vertrouwen in de lid-staten zal behouden.

The fact that the government has taken a positive stance with regard to the establishment of the fund, in spite of the objections mentioned above, finds its cause in the following considerations:

It is considered of the highest importance for the Dutch economy that other industrialized countries [...] can be supported via the fund, so that they are not forced to resort to debt moratoria and trade restriction measures. It was further assumed that the mere existence of a safety net such as this will contribute to maintaining the trust of the international finance world in the member states.

The first paragraph announces the considerations of the government. Because of the passives in the second paragraph (*wordt van belang geacht*, 'is considered of the highest importance', *worden bijgestaan*, 'be supported', *worden gedwongen*, 'are forced', *verondersteld wordt*, 'is assumed'), we get the impression that the considerations mentioned there are those of someone else, or perhaps those with which the government does not agree. However, this is not the case: the considerations in the second paragraph are those of the same government announced in the first paragraph. Therefore this fragment is not optimally coherent. Here, the passive could and perhaps should have been avoided.

The present research aims to solve the dilemma whilst accounting for the passive's wide applicability by offering a description of the discourse functions of the passive that is precise enough to determine when the passive is functionally used, and when it is not. The research will do so in general by proposing a *meaning* for the passive construction. From this meaning, it is possible to derive certain functions of the passive, both in combination with other linguistic elements (for example with the *door*-phrase, see Chapter 4) and in certain texts and contexts (for example in argumentative texts, policy papers, soccer reports and computer manuals; Chapters 5 and 6). The relation between meaning, function(s) and effect(s) is also a topic of research (see section 8.1).

Note that in both text fragments, i.e. in (1) and in (3), the passive seems to have a certain perspective effect. In (1), I described this as 'seeing through the eyes of' a person (i.e. in terms of 'focalization', Bal 1990), and 'assuming a certain world view'. In (3), it can better be described as 'the information presented by means of

passives does not belong to the writer's point of view': the writer expresses a certain distance between his own viewpoint and the information introduced in the passives. There is one textbook on writing in which the passive is explicitly linked to perspective effects: *Formuleren* ('formulating'), Onrust *et al.* (1993), in Chapter 4. The authors claim that the passive is used in order to present a situation in a way other than from the agent's perspective (p. 86). In three cases, *Formuleren* claims, this function is useful: something else's perspective is used instead (that of the patient), no particular perspective is chosen (the agent is left vague and full attention is on the event), or the participants appear in special position (the patient clause-initially, or the agent clause-finally). However, *Formuleren* does not define the notion of perspective, and it does not become clear how we should understand the perspective of, for example, inanimate patient subjects such as a bridge (*de brug wordt morgen voor het publiek opengesteld*, 'the bridge will be opened for the public tomorrow', p. 88; an example of a different perspective). The notion therefore remains vague.

There is one more problem with *Formuleren*: its advice on the use of the passive leads to the very same dilemma as was discussed in section 1.2. *Formuleren* gives three reasons why the passive should be used, and then argues against using it too often; the *worden*-passive in particular should be avoided. *Formuleren* apparently leaves the decision when to use and when to avoid the passive to the writer's intuition, even though the book promises to illuminate the system of choices which good writers make intuitively. Although *Formuleren* seems to be a step in the right direction, more clarity is needed both about the notion of 'perspective' and about when to use and when not to use the passive.

Note also that when we add *Formuleren*'s three functions of the passive (with several subfunctions) to Renkema's six mentioned above, we have nine functions. Other authors have described even more: Winkler (1985:67/68) found 18 different functions of the passive in the literature. Some of these even contradict each other (i.e. agent promotion versus demotion). In order to avoid such a complex and implausible view of the passive, I will assume, as an initial guideline, that the passive should be described as one construction having one meaning. This one meaning may be realized in several different ways (for example in different contexts and text kinds, with different verbs, with or without overt agent, with varying word order, etc.), but the core meaning remains unchanged. As we will see from Chapters 3 onwards, the passive has one meaning (it is not even polysemous), which can be used in several different ways to realize different discourse functions (and thus have different effects). The passive *is* a construction with a stable meaning, but that construction may *do* various things. One preliminary advantage of a more 'frugal' approach to the function(s), effect(s) and meaning of the passive is that such an approach may help to avoid the dilemma: the more functions are distinguished, the more functional the passive seems, and the more difficult it is to

determine where, when and why the passive should be avoided. I will reflect on the multitude of functions versus the single meaning that I will be proposing for the passive in Chapter 8.

1.3 TERMINOLOGY

As we will see, the terminology used in the literature to describe the function of the passive in discourse is rather vague: notions such as topic, point of view, emphasis, etc. are not often well defined. Most of the notions will not become clearer until the next chapter where I will discuss the literature from which the terms originate. In this section, I only specify some of the more general terms that we need in order to begin talking about the passive at all. I will also show that even before going deeply into linguistic theory, there are some interesting problems with the terminology, problems that warrant further research.

In Chapter 3, I will show that the *worden*-passive is the only 'real' Dutch passive. I will do so on the basis of linguistic argumentation, but an extra reason for singling out *worden* is that *Formuleren* states that the *worden*-passive leads to the most serious 'passivitis'[3] problems (see the previous subsection, and see also Verhagen 1992 on which the discussion of the passive in *Formuleren* is based). Thus, the restriction of this research to *worden*-passives is theoretically and practically motivated. The discussion will therefore focus on *worden*-passives from the beginning (as will become clear from the examples), i.e. on the construction with *worden* as an auxiliary verb and a past participle which either evokes an implicit agent or makes this agent explicit by means of an oblique phrase with *door*.

Many passives have an active counterpart that is more or less synonymous, and that consists of an active verb and two participants.[4] The implicit or overt agent of the passive is the active counterpart's grammatical subject; the passive's grammatical subject is the active's object. However, not all passives in Dutch have a subject; these impersonal passives will be included in the analysis alongside personal ones. I will refer to them as 'impersonal passives' rather than 'pseudo-passives' because they are as 'passive' as the personal ones, and not 'pseudo' (cf. Kirsner 1976a,b,

and see section 3.5).[5]

As will become apparent in the next chapters, most analyses of the passive (in any branch of linguistics, formal as much as functional) have depended too heavily on the relation of the passive with its active counterpart: the passive is usually analyzed vis-à-vis its active counterpart, either as a result of a grammatical operation or as a pragmatic alternative. I will propose an analysis of the passive as a primarily *independent* construction, i.e. independent of an active counterpart. In order to avoid terminology that directly links passives to actives, I will avoid referring to 'underlying' or 'logical' subjects and objects. Rather, I will refer to the participants in the passive as agent and patient, using the names of the most prototypical case roles of those participants. However, other case roles are possible (i.e. those of, for example, effector, causative, experiencer on the agent's side; and theme or absolute on the patient's side[6]). 'Agent' and 'patient' are convenient names for the most prototypical roles, used here as a kind of 'macrorole' (a little like 'actor' and 'undergoer' in role and reference grammar, Van Valin 1993). In the passive, the patient is the (grammatical) subject and the agent is realized in an oblique phrase (mostly with *door*) or left implicit. In Chapter 3, I will argue for other names for the two participants, i.e. for 'causer' and 'trajector', in order to distinguish the passive participants from their active counterparts. However, 'agent' and 'patient' will do to begin with. 'Participants' refers to both parties, agent and patient.

The notion of 'perspective' that I introduced as a sign for the direction in which to search for the discourse function of the passive is problematic in itself. Sanders (1994:1.2) distinguishes three aspects of perspective in discourse: world view (depending on, for example, an ideological or political orientation, or a point of view in a specific discussion), vantage point (the viewpoint from which something is represented and the resulting specific orientation of objects; 'camera angle'), and subjective point of view (the represented discourse or thoughts of others). The passive seems to have to do with all three. In (3), the passive has an effect on a certain point of view in a discussion; in (1), the passive is used to show a certain vantage point of the narrating child, from which the mother is seen. The passive can also be used to introduce represented discourse or the thoughts of others. In the following example, taken from the corpus of Koole & Ten Thije (1994), a passive of *zeggen* ('to say'), *gezegd werd*, is used to introduce direct speech (see also

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3. See for this term Renkema (1989 and other editions). I will use 'passivitis' for 'discourse problems caused by the use of (too many) passives'. I will discuss some possible causes of these problems in Chapters 5 and following. A similar term is 'Tante Doortje stijl' (lit. Aunt Doortje style; *door* being the passive agent's preposition as well as a woman's name); analogous to the 'Tante Betje stijl', the name for an inversion problem. Since problems with passives may occur without *door*, I prefer 'passivitis'.

4. But see for this similarity, and the differences between the passive and its active counterpart, section 3.4.

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5. For an interesting discussion of the origin of the notion 'passive', see Andersen (1989).

6. There seems to be little agreement in the literature as to how many Fillmorean case roles should or can be distinguished; see Van Valin (1993); Fillmore (1968), and for a discussion of the notion 'agent' in this framework of case grammar, Cruse (1973).

Cornelis & ten Thije 1995):

(4) Ik bedoel met de leerstof nu dat ik het verhelderend vond destijds om te zien hoe in dat OMA-project gezegd werd: "Nu doen we 's een/ nu hebben we gewoon eens een verhaal wat speelt/ dat gaat over een andere cultuur dan de meeste kinderen in de klas." (AC3-2/212-218)
What I mean concerning the subject matter is that, at that time, I found it illuminating to see how in this OMA-project it was said: 'Now we will do an / now at last we have an actual story / that is about another culture than that of most children in the class.'

However, as we will see in Chapter 6, the combination of a passive of *zeggen* with direct speech is rare. It seems to be the case, therefore, that there is some effect of the passive with respect to all three aspects of perspective. 'Perspective' is perhaps too broad and vague a notion to describe the discourse function of the passive, even though the term may point in a promising direction.

'Perspective' also seems to be a popular and often used term in recent (functional, cognitive and formal) linguistic theory. For example, it is used by Caenepeel (1989) in relation to aspect, Clark (1990) in language acquisition, Spooren & Jaspers (1990) in text analysis, Li & Zubin (1990) for anaphoric referring expressions, Koole & Ten Thije (1994) in intercultural communication research, Bartsch (1986/7) in formal semantics, Jaspers (1989) in text advice, Pander Maat & Sanders (1995) for the meaning of Dutch *dus* ('thus'), to name but a few. All of these authors use 'perspective' in a different way. There also is a whole range of related terms: point of view (Emanatian 1991, Dik 1989, Wilks & Bien 1983, Simpson 1993, Herrmann 1996), viewpoint (DeLancey 1982, Graumann 1992), reference point (Langacker 1993, Van Hoek 1992), starting point (MacWhinney 1977), empathy (Kuno 1987), attention (Tomlin, forthcoming), subjectivity (Langacker 1985,1990,1991a:Ch.12, Carey 1994, Verhagen 1995a), mental spaces (Fauconnier 1985, Sanders & Redeker 1993,1996) and perhaps also notions such as topic and theme (see Chapter 2). It seems to be the case that 'perspective' is a useful and attractive term. However, without specifying in an exact way what is meant by it, it runs a risk of becoming a term for any vaguely subjective effect, no longer explaining anything, and impossible to test. I will discuss at least those notions and views that are used in literature on the passive, especially in Chapter 2, and I will integrate them as much as possible in Chapters 3 and thereafter. It is, however, impossible to define, discuss and compare all of these notions, because, to give but one reason, not all authors provide exact definitions of their own terminology. I will therefore define the terminology used here as well as possible, and clearly enough to make empirical claims possible.

1.4 OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK; MATERIALS USED

To sum up, the research question is: 'what is the function of the Dutch passive in texts?'. The answer to this question is subject to the following restrictions: the discourse function(s) should preferably be given in terms of, or at least compatible with, perspective effects; it should be applicable to any passive in any text type (i.e. from literary texts to argumentative discourse; and preferably also to spoken discourse, although the spoken language falls outside the scope of this research, with some minor exceptions such as (4)); it should be based on a linguistic analysis of the passive (i.e. it should, if possible, not only discuss what the passive does in texts, but also what it is, both in relation and in contrast to other constructions of the language); it should provide opportunities to improve text advice by offering a solution to the 'avoid the passive, unless...' dilemma; it should be compatible with the facts of the Dutch language, especially with its peculiarities as compared to English, such as the existence of impersonal passives. Last but not least, it should be as well defined and as empirically testable as is possible at this moment. We will see, however, that both the concepts of the theoretical framework that I will use and the available empirical instruments to 'measure' the passive's meaning (or function/effect) have their limitations. I will return to the latter issue (i.e. the empirical methods) in Chapters 5-7.

In Chapter 2 I will discuss functional linguistic literature on the discourse function of the passive. Although this discussion will provide some clarity, many questions remain. Chapter 3 deals not with what the passive *does* (i.e. its discourse function), but with what it *is*: a construction with a meaning. This meaning is influenced by the meanings of the parts of the construction: the passive auxiliary and participle (and the agentive marker *door* in the case of an overt agent; Chapter 4). On the basis of this meaning, it will become possible to specify the discourse functions of the passive, both in general and in particular: for certain kinds of passives (i.e. those with an overt agent in the *door*-phrase, Chapter 4), for passives used in three different kinds of text (sports reports, computer manuals and policy papers; Chapter 5), and for passives of certain 'perspective-introducing' verbs in argumentative texts (Chapter 6). The empirical Chapters 4-6 (with results from qualitative and quantitative corpus and text analyses and experiments) serve both as an illustration of the perspective effects caused by the passive (understandable on the basis of the meaning described in Chapter 3), and as a means of providing evidence for the meaning of the passive found in Chapter 3. The Chapters 7 and 8 contain an overview of the results and some reflections.

A final aim of this research is to make evident that the more practically-oriented branches of linguistics such as document design may benefit from a fine-grained linguistic ('theoretical') analysis of a construction. Although the analysis will at times be rather theoretical, and will at least seem to be far away from discourse

(we will, for example, consider the Middle Dutch origin and the diachronic development of the passive in Chapter 3, and in Chapter 4 we will dive deeply into the lexical semantics of the preposition *door*), all of this linguistic theorizing will turn out to be both useful and necessary to determine the passive's discourse functions: a description of what the passive *is* serves as the basis for the description of what it *does*. Because of the aim of the research, however, the theoretical discussions are inspired by and will be based on cognitive and functional linguistics rather than on, for example, formal linguistics: the aim is to make a statement about language as it is used by people in actual discourse, not just about the language system and the language user's knowledge about that system. However, I believe this system to be based on language use: in Chapter 3, I will propose a way in which the passive is represented in the language user's knowledge. This representation serves as a starting point in language use. System and use can be described in an integrated way (see also Langacker 1988,1991a:Ch.10). I therefore hesitate to label this research as, for example, (discourse-)pragmatically oriented. Rather, it aims to integrate the (discourse-)pragmatic, semantic and grammatical aspects of the passive.

Throughout this book, I have used as many examples from real texts (rather than constructed examples) as possible. Some of these examples come from my own collection of texts in which the passive is used in usual and unusual ways. In these cases, I have given references to the original work in the text. Some examples are taken from dictionaries, especially WNT (1912) and MNW (1969-1977). Most of the examples, however, come from computerized text corpora. I have used the Eindhoven Corpus (described in Uit den Boogaart 1975), in the version available from the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam, the corpus of Vandenbosch (described in Vandenbosch 1992), for which I would like to thank Luc Vandenbosch, and the '5 million corpus' of the INL (see Kruyt 1995), for which I would like to thank the Institute of Dutch Lexicology in Leiden.

The choice for a certain text or corpus was partly incidental (especially for the isolated examples in the first chapters), and partly based on pragmatic reasons. For example, in order to find enough cases of a combination of *terecht* with a passive, as in sections 6.3 and 6.4, I had to use the largest corpus to which I had access, i.e. that of the INL, but in order to make an inventory of all *door*-phrases in passives, I only needed a small but 'representative' corpus, i.e. that of Vandenbosch (1992). The way the corpora are coded and made accessible (i.e. the Eindhoven Corpus is rich in morphological coding; the INL has lemma access) sometimes also decided for their use in answering a certain research question. I will give the source of each example found in a corpus, and motivations for the use of a certain text or corpus where necessary. I will use abbreviations to the three most frequently used corpora, i.e. VDB for that of Vandenbosch (1992), EC for the Eindhoven Corpus, and INL for the 5 million corpus of the Institute of Dutch Lexicology (INL).

Although the corpora are all different, I will consider them as representative for Dutch discourse, all in their own specific way. The written corpus VDB consists of 50% literary-narrative and 50% popular-scientific and formal texts (entire texts, not fragments); of each group, 50% is from the Netherlands, 50% from Belgium. The EC consists of five subcorpora: (fragments of) daily newspapers, weeklies, family magazines, popular-scientific journals and novels. The two additional subcorpora of spoken language and government language (see Renkema 1981) were only included in the study of the *door*-phrase in Chapter 4.

Finally, two more practical issues. This book is in English, but it is about the passive in Dutch, and, as we will see throughout this book (and especially in Chapters 2 and 8), there are some interesting differences between the passives in those two languages. One important difference that is that *worden*, 'to become', is the (most important) passive auxiliary in Dutch. In the translations of examples, I have only added '(lit: 'become')' in glosses and cases where *worden*'s role is highly salient. *Worden* makes the passive more strongly processual than its English counterpart with *be*. In fact, the best English equivalent is often a progressive passive. This difference in the 'processuality' of the auxiliaries has consequences for the passive's meaning and its functions in discourse, as will become especially clear in Chapter 3. Second, the unit of analysis throughout the book will be the clause, the text's constructional unit.[7] In some corpus analyses with the EC (and always accounted for in the text), the unit is the whole sentence, because the EC is accessible at the level of the sentence only.

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7. Including non-finite passives, for example: *de affaire is kennelijk te controversieel om te worden behandeld* ('The affair is apparently too controversial to be dealt with').

2. The functionalists' difficulties with the Dutch passive[1]

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will look at proposals in the literature on the discourse function of the passive. In the discussion of these proposals, which have been made in the literature for either the passive as a cross-linguistic category, or for the passive in a specific language (often English), I will judge them by their validity for the Dutch passive, and especially by their usefulness in understanding at least the perspective effects of the passive as presented in Chapter 1: the passive may create a sense of alienation (as in example 1 from *Kinderjaren*), it has an effect on argumentation (as in example 3), and its use may lead to problems in discourse, and to a dilemma for writers. The emphasis in this chapter will be on functionalist literature, i.e. linguistic literature that concentrates on the discourse function of linguistic constructions.

This chapter will focus on what the passive does, i.e. on its discourse function as described in the literature, and it will do so mainly by comparing the passive to its active counterpart. Although this analysis-by-comparison has some disadvantages (as will become even clearer in the next chapter, where the passive construction will be analyzed as an independent construction), it is how the passive is dealt with in the majority of theories. It seems as if the idea that passives are somehow derived from (underlying) actives not only influenced formal linguistics (since Chomsky's passive transformation; Chomsky 1957), but functional linguistics as well. I will return to the peculiarity of considering passives in comparison to actives only in the conclusion (section 2.5); in the bulk of this chapter I will follow the literature in comparing actives to passives.

First of all, section 2.2 will present the idea (which is widespread in functionally oriented linguistics) that the difference between active and passive is one of topicality of the participants: in the active voice, the agent is more topical than the patient; in the passive, this is the other way around. Although there is empirical evidence for this shift in relative topicality, there are a number of unsolved

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1. This title is inspired by Cuey-Na-Gael (1908,1993).

problems with this analysis, both in general and for Dutch in particular. I will therefore abandon the 'relative topicality shift' analysis. In section 2.3, we will look at other useful (though still problematic) related analyses: Kirsner's notion of 'agent not central', and proposals in terms of attention, empathy, starting point, and point of view. 'Agent not central' is interesting because of its relevance for Dutch, and the other approaches are interesting because they are closer to the notion of 'perspective' that was introduced in Chapter 1 than the approaches in terms of topicality. The conclusion at the end of section 2.4 will be that in the passive, the agent (or its perspective) is somehow 'not central', but that it is not exactly clear how.

In section 2.4, we will look at the passive and its function in texts from a different angle, i.e. one 'mediated' by the notion of transitivity: the passive belongs to the narrative background, because it is not highly transitive. In order to understand this line of reasoning, the relation between the passive and transitivity will first be discussed. We will look at the passive predicate in particular, because this has been neglected in those approaches that have concentrated more on the participants. However, the participants also play a role in transitivity. In the conclusion (section 2.5), the results from this survey of the literature will be summarized. It will become clear that on the basis of this literature, the discourse function of the passive can be described as something like 'decentralizing the agent' and 'detransitivizing the predicate'. The relation between these two functions, however, remains unclear.

2.2 TOPICALITY OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In functional linguistics, passive and active clauses have often been analyzed as counterparts of each other, differing in the 'prominence' of their main participants, agent and patient. In this section, I will discuss this analysis and show that it leads to a number of interesting observations, but also to confusion as well as a number of problems. Some of these are of a general nature; others become apparent when we try to apply the functionalists' insights to a few Dutch text fragments and examples. Although the functionalist literature often claims a general, cross-linguistic validity of the analysis of the passive ('what is 'the communicative function of the passive in language?'), it will turn out that the proposals lean heavily on the facts of English and fail to account for some of the peculiarities of the Dutch passive. We will therefore have to reject the idea of 'relative topicality shift', at least as an explanation for the occurrence of the Dutch passive in discourse. However, the exploration of the 'relative topicality shift' literature will provide us with a number of interesting correlations between the occurrence of the passive and the characteristics of its participants (i.e. agent and patient) that should be taken into consideration in any alternative analysis of the passive.

2.2.1 The proposal: a shift in relative topicality

In functional analyses of the passive, a number of terms are used to describe its function. The terminology differs from author to author, but the following generalization can be made: in an active clause, the agent is 'theme' (the Prague school and Halliday 1967, 1985, cf. Li n.d., and see also Tomlin 1983) or 'topic' (in terms of accessibility; Givón 1982, 1993, Lempert 1984, and see also Ariel 1988, or in terms of 'given'; Krauthamer 1981, 1982, Birner 1996), or more 'cohesive' (Bolkestein & Risselada 1987); and the patient is 'rheme', 'non-topic' or 'focus', less 'cohesive' or 'new'. In the passive, the two participants exchange position: the patient is theme, topic or given. The exact status of the agent is a problem in these approaches, as we will see below, but it is either non-topical, or rheme/focus/new. The analyses can be schematized as follows, including an example:

Table 2.1: the passive in functional approaches

	Theme Topic Given		Rheme Non-Topic OR Focus New	
Active	AGENT		PATIENT	
	Het konijn 'The rabbit	eet eats	de wortel the carrot'	
Passive	PATIENT		AGENT (optional)	
	De wortel 'The carrot	wordt is	(door het konijn) (by the rabbit)	gegeten eaten'

Compared to its active counterpart, the passive's patient is considered to be *promoted* (from object to subject and/or to the clause-initial topic position) and the passive's agent to be *demoted* (from subject to oblique or even implicit, and away from the initial topic position).[2] I refer to the functionalists' analysis of the passive as the 'relative topicality shift' of agent and patient in passives as compared to their active counterparts. Note that the difference between active and passive is considered to be a pragmatic one only: the two constructions differ in the

2. I will use the terms 'demotion' and 'promotion' rather than 'backgrounding' and 'foregrounding', because I will use 'background' and 'foreground' in a more specialized sense in relation to transitivity and narrative structure (section 2.4).