

The choice between *bli*-passive and *s*-passive in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish

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1. Introduction*

Danish, Norwegian and Swedish all have two ways of forming passive sentences. One way is morphological and consists of adding *-s* to the verb. The other way is periphrastic and involves a form of the verb *bli* (become) plus a perfect participle. Both passives are used productively in all the languages, but there are systematic differences in the ways they are used. In this report I want to discuss what kind of factors can potentially influence which passive form is chosen.

I believe that the factors that can influence the choice of passive can be grouped together in five major types:

- factors having to do with the *use* of the utterance (as a general rule, an instruction, a description, a warning etc)
- factors having to do with the morphological availability of the passive forms (*s*-passive is not available in the past and perfect tense in some languages)
- factors having to do with semantic properties of the verb or the verb phrase (such as aktionsart, aspect and semantic roles)
- factors having to do with lexical restrictions (some verbs only have one passive form)
- factors having to do with syntactic restrictions (in certain syntactic constructions only one passive is possible).

In section 2, I will give a brief presentation of these factors, without trying to be exhaustive and without attempting to evaluate their overall importance. I will then look at to what extent the different factors are relevant for each of the languages. Finally I will try to summarise my current understanding of why different forms may be used in the different languages to express the same meaning. For this report I have made use of traditional grammars, native speakers' intuitions and large text corpora,

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in particular the Swedish PAROLE corpus at Språkbanken, Göteborg, the Bokmål corpus at the Text Laboratory at the University of Oslo and the Norwegian Text Archive at the University of Bergen.¹

2. Factors affecting the choice of passive

2.1. Conditions of use of the passive forms

Many traditional grammars address the difference in use between the two passive forms. For instance the Danish grammarian Kristian Mikkelsen writes in *Dansk ordføjningslære* (1911:381) that for those verbs that may occur in both forms, the simple passive (*s*-passive) is used to express states and unfinished actions, repeated actions and what usually happens. The periphrastic passive is preferably used to express singular completed actions. A couple of his examples that contain both forms are given in (1).²

- (1) a Vi kan snart komme til at spise; for mens maden (D)
we can soon come to to-INF eat; for while the.food
laves i køkkenet, **bliver** der **dækket** bord i lysthuset.
make-S in the.kitchen, BLI there set table in the.pavillion
 ‘We can soon eat, for while the food is being prepared in the kitchen,
 the table is laid in the pavillion’
- b I dette hus **spises** der i almindelighed til middag klokken 12,
in this hous eat-S there in general dinner at 12 o’clock,
 men i dag **bliver** der først **spist** klokken 4.
but today BLI there first eaten at 4 o’clock
 ‘In this house, dinner is normally served at 12 o’clock,
 but today we won’t eat until 4 o’clock.’

A few years later, the Norwegian grammarian August Western makes a similar statement in *Norsk riksmåls-grammatik* (1921:159-161). He says that the general practical rule is that the *bli*-passive is used to express completed actions whereas the *s*-form is used for actions which are not restricted to a particular time. From this general rule, he derives certain tendencies for the different forms to occur in different tenses. For instance, *bli*-passive is most common in the past tense, whereas *s*-passive is often used in the present tense and in infinitives. When both forms are used in the present tense, they conform to the general rule as shown in (2).

- (2) Fluesoppen **spises** ikke (er ikke spiselig; (N)
toadstool-DEF eat-S not (is not edible;
 men allikevel **blir** den kanskje undertiden **spist**).
but still BLI it maybe off and on eaten)
 ‘The toadstool should not be eaten, but off and on it gets eaten’

¹ See the references for net addresses. I have not been able to access any tagged Danish corpus. Carl Vikner has been very helpful and extracted some data from the Bergenholz corpus.

² In this paper I will gloss the two passives as follows: The *s*-passive will be glossed with the corresponding English tensed verb form plus *S*. The periphrastic forms will be glossed with the tensed form of the verb *bli* (i.e. *BLI* for present and infinitive, *BLEV* for past tense and *BLIVIT* for the supine) followed by the perfect participle of the verb.

Western mentions specifically that the *s*-form is used in instructions, rules and advertisements.

- (3) a Melet **røres** i mens vannet koker (N)
the flour stir-S in while the water boils
 ‘Stir in the flour while the water is boiling’
- b Komma **settes** foran men. (N)
comma put-S before but
 ‘A comma should be put before but’
- c Gammelt jern **køpes** og **selges** (N)
old iron buy-S and sell-S
 ‘Old iron bought and sold’

The contemporary Swedish linguist Adolf Noreen interestingly enough doesn’t address the issue of the use of the two passives at all in his monumental *Vårt språk* (Volume V, 1925) although he gives examples of both *s*-passive and *bli*-passive. The grammarian Natanael Beckman also does not mention any general rule governing the choice of passive. In *Svensk språklära* (1916:158) he says that the *s*-form is preferred when you want to express a norm or a general prescription, but otherwise focusses more on the interaction between the choice of passive and the aktionsart (see section 2.3.1).

In addition to the uses that Western notices, let us add that the *s*-passive is often the only possible form on signs (see (4a)) and that the *s*-passive can also be used as a warning that something is about to happen, as for instance when a tube driver announces (4c).

- (4) a Døren **åpnes** utover. (N)
the.door open-S outward
 ‘The door opens outward’
- b *Døren **blir åpnet** utover.
- c Dørene **lukkes!**
the.doors close-S
 ‘The doors are about to be closed’
- b *Dørene **blir lukket!**

Western’s description characterises the situation for one of the official written standards in Norway, *bokmål*. For the other standard, *nynorsk*, the situation is somewhat different. According to Hellevik (1977) only the periphrastic passives are used. He claims that the morphological passive, which in *nynorsk* has an *-st* ending, is only used in connection with modal auxiliaries. Cf the following examples from Hellevik (1977:86).

- (5) a Varene måtte **seljast** med tap (Nynorsk)
the.goods had-to sell-S with loss
 ‘The goods had to be sold with a loss’

- b Det kan ikkje **seiast** for ofte at ...
it can not say-S too often that
 'It cannot be said too often that ...'

Previous research on the passives in the Scandinavian languages has also looked at the frequency of the passive forms in spoken and written language as well as in different genres. All the grammarians mentioned here associate *s*-passive with the written mode, in particular bureaucratic writings. This still seems to be the case in Danish and Norwegian, but less so in Swedish. In this report I will have little to say about this factor, but see Holm (1952, 1967), Hansen (1967) and Jones & Gade (1990) for discussion.

2.1.1. The choice of passive as an indication of mood

Let us follow the Danish tradition a bit further. Heltoft (1994) and Heltoft & Falster Jakobsen (1996) claim that in present day Danish, the choice of passive is correlated with a choice of mood. *s*-passive is used to express that something holds objectively, because of a norm, generally and independently of the speaker; *bli*-passive is used for reporting singular events which are 'subjectively anchored'. This distinction allows the authors to account for the following examples (their (6)).

- (6) a Der **tales** ikke mere dansk i Skåne. (D) *generic interpret.*
there speak-S no longer Danish in Scania
 'Danish is no longer spoken in Scania'
- b Der **bliver** (ofte) **talt** dansk i Skåne (D) *actual events*
there BLI (often) spoken Danish in Scania
 'Danish is (often) spoken in Scania'

The generic statement in (6a) is not contradicted by the report in (6b) of individual Danish speaking events. According to Heltoft & Falster Jakobsen, the choice of passive interacts with other constructions such as the presentational construction to signal whether a particular utterance is to be understood as objectively or subjectively. Heltoft (1994) assumes that the *s*-passive is the unmarked form. The *bli*-passive is marked in that it requires subjective anchoring to be used.

2.2. Tense

One thing that clearly affects the choice of passive forms in Danish and Norwegian is the fact that the morphological passive, the one obtained by adding *-s* to the tense marked verb, is only productively used in the present tense and in the infinitive. Western sees this as a consequence of his general rule, viz. that the *s*-form is used when the actions do not have specific time reference. The situation is actually rather complicated. In both Danish and Norwegian there are some verbs that have past tense *s*-passive forms (see e.g. Mikkelsen 1911:379f. for some detailed observations regarding phonological and morphological conditions) but these are rather few. In Swedish on the other hand, *s*-passive is used productively in all tenses, including the supine form used to form the perfect and the pluperfect e.g. *boken har skrivits* (the book has been written).

2.3. Semantic properties of the verb and the verb phrase

2.3.1. Aktionsart and aspect

Both aktionsart and aspect have been assumed to play a role. In general writers take the *s*-passive to be stative and the *bli*-passive to be dynamic. Mikkelsen (1916:381ff) writes for instance that for stative (atelic) verbs the *s*-form is preferred and that the *bli*-passive is only used if you want to focus on the inception of the state, cf (7a). The same point is made in *Svenska Akademiens Grammatik* (SAG)³ from where (7b) is taken. The adverbial picks out the time until the state begins to hold.

- (7) a Hvor han kommer hen, **bliver** han **elsket** af alle. (D)
wherever he goes BLI he loved by everyone
'Wherever he goes, people start to love him.'
- b Läkarna **blev** på kort tid intensivt **avskydda** SAG §27 (S)
the.doctors BLEV in short time intensely despised
av hela den övriga personalen
by all the remaining staff

When the *bli*-passive is used with a telic verb, there may be some focus on the resultant state.

- (8) Här **blir** man fort **glömd** (om man inte ser till att **synas**) SAG §27 (S)
here BLI one quickly forgotten (if one not sees to to-INF see-S)
'Here you are quickly forgotten (if you don't see to it that you are seen)'

2.3.2. Semantic roles

Many traditional grammars note that certain verb types prefer one or the other of the passives. The most systematic presentation is given in SAG, which tries to correlate the choice of passive with the semantic roles of the verbs. Here I will just give a few examples of such correlations. Verbs with an experiencer role often take the *s*-form, as do verbs with a recipient role.

- (9) a Klockorna **hörs** vida omkring SAG §3b (S)
the.bells hear-S widely
'The bells can be heard from far away'
- b Guldringen **hittades** av ett par småpojkar
the.gold ring found-S by a couple of small boys

Sundman (1983) and Hedlund (1992) look at which argument subject oriented adverbs like *gärna* ('willingly') modify. Looking primarily at Swedish, they find that subject oriented adverbs tend to be construed with the surface subject of a *bli*-passive and with the (sometimes unexpressed) agent of an *s*-passive.⁴

³ All references to SAG are to chapter 34 which deals with passives.

⁴ There also seems to be an interaction with semantic roles. Hedlund (1992) gives the minimal pair below.

- (10) b Flyktingar **blir** gärna **mottagna** av Röda Kors-personal. (S)
refugees BLI willingly received by Red Cross personnel
 ‘Refugees like to be received by staff from the Red Cross’
- a Flyktingar **tas** inte gärna emot (sedan bidragen sänktes).
refugees receive-S not willingly (since the.subsidies reduced-S)
 ‘The councils don’t want to receive refugees since the subsidies were reduced.’

What semantic roles favour the *bli*-passive? One generalisation proposed in SAG is that the *bli*-passive is preferred if the subject of the passive sentence can influence the situation to some extent. This might explain why in the complement of subject control verbs like *försöka* (‘try’), the *bli*-form is preferred.

- (11) a Representanten försökte **bli omvald** (S)
the.representative tried BLI reelected
- b ^{??}Representanten försökte **omväljas**
the.representative tried reelect-S

SAG also claims that animate (agentive) subjects are more likely to take *bli*-passive and that inanimate subjects are more likely to occur with an *s*-passive.

2.3.3. Control

The notion of influence, or control, mentioned in the preceding section also seems to be relevant for other constructions. Sundman (1983) notices a parallellism between imperatives and *bli*-passive, illustrated in (12)-(14).

- (12) a Tappa inte glaset! (S)
drop not the.glass
 ‘Don’t drop the glass!’
- b [?] Tappa glaset!
- (13) a **Bli inte rånad** i Chicago! (S)
BLI not robbed in Chicago
 ‘Don’t get robbed in Chicago!’
- b [?] **Bli rånad** i Chicago!
BLI robbed in Chicago

-
- (i) Harry **blev** gärna **opererad**
 Harry BLI willingly operated
 ‘Harry willingly subjected himself to the operation’
- (ii) Harry **opererades** gärna
 Harry operated-S willingly
 ‘The doctors liked to operate Harry.’

I find it hard to get an agent oriented interpretation of (ii), but in (10b), the interpretation where the unexpressed recipient is understood to be willing is fine.

- (14) a ***Rånas** inte i Chicago. (S)
rob-S not in Chicago
 b ***Rånas** i Chicago!
rob-S in Chicago

The verb *tappa* means ‘drop unintentionally’. Whereas (12a) is a plausible utterance, (12b) is strange, unless it is for instance part of a director’s instructions to an actor. Similarly, the negative imperative in (13a) is possible whereas the positive imperative in (13b) is strange. According to Sundman (1983:107), this is because “it is easier not to make oneself susceptible of an action ... than to make some other participant perform an action of a particular kind.” Note that there is a clear contrast between the imperative *bli*-passive and the imperative *s*-passive, which doesn’t allow even the coerced interpretation ‘don’t let yourself be’. SAG also notes that passive imperatives in the *bli*-form tend to get an interpretation where the understood subject willingly submits to undergoing the action.

- (15) **Bli omskött** /***omsköts** av världens mest serviceinriktade personal. (S)
BLI cared for by the.world’s most service minded staff SAG §22.
 ‘Allow yourself to be cared for by the most serviceminded staff
 in the world!’

2.4. Lexical restrictions

In order for there to be a choice of passive forms, both the *bli*-passive and the *s*-passive must be available for a given lexical item. Whereas there has been a lot of research on which verbs in general occur in the passive (see Lødrup (in prep.) for a recent proposal), the question which passive forms are actually used for individual verbs does not seem to have received much attention. I was prompted to investigate this when I tried to translate Heltoft & Falster Jakobsen’s examples in (6) into Swedish.

- (16) a Det **talas** inte längre danska i Skåne. *generic interpret.* (S)
there speak-S no longer Danish in Scania
 ‘Danish is no longer spoken in Scania’
 b ??Det **blir** (ofta) **talat** danska i Skåne ??
there BLI (often) spoken Danish in Scania
 c Det **talas** (ofta) danska i Skåne *actual events*
there speak-S often Danish in Scania
 ‘Danish is often spoken in Scania’

(16a) with the *s*-passive seems to have the same interpretation as the corresponding Danish example. However, rendering the Danish *bli*-passive in (6b) with a *bli*-passive in Swedish, as in (16b), is not felicitous. This is a strange utterance and it is not clear what it would mean. In order to convey the meaning associated with the Danish (6b) you use (16c) in Swedish, with the *s*-passive. When I looked for occurrences of *tala* in

the *bli*-passive in the 25 million word Swedish PAROLE corpus⁵, I found no instances. But there were 854 examples involving *s*-passive forms. I then did a brief search of some other frequent verbs. The result is given in (17).⁶

(17)	s-form	bli-form
<i>tala</i>	854	0
<i>stänga</i>	390	0
<i>öppna</i>	764	0

It thus turns out that in Swedish, many frequent verbs are not or hardly used at all in the *bli*-form. This clearly affects the range of possible interpretations of the *s*-passive.

2.4.1. ‘Blocking’

Mikkelsen (1911:379) notes that the *s*-form is avoided in the passive sense if it also has a reciprocal interpretation. He gives minimal pairs as in (18) and (19) and notes that the *s*-form can be used if there is no fear of misunderstanding (cf (19c) where the adverbial *sammen* (‘together’) preempts the reciprocal reading).

- | | | | |
|--------|---|-------------------|-----|
| (18) a | <i>Ægtefolket blev skilt</i>
<i>the.couple BLEV divorced</i> | <i>passive</i> | (D) |
| b | <i>Ægtefolket skiltes aldrig et øjeblik</i>
<i>the.couple separated-S never a moment</i>
‘The couple never left each other for a moment’ | <i>reciprocal</i> | |
| (19) a | <i>De to unge blev aldrig set i selskaber</i>
<i>the two young BLEV never seen at parties</i> | <i>passive</i> | (D) |
| b | <i>De to unge sås aldrig uden om søndagen</i>
<i>the two young saw-S never except on Sunday</i>
‘The young couple only saw each other on Sundays’ | <i>reciprocal</i> | |
| c | <i>De ses næsten aldrig sammen</i>
<i>they see-S almost never together</i>
‘They are almost never seen together’ | <i>passive</i> | |

A different type of lexical blocking in Swedish is provided by the verb *finna* (‘find’). A regularly formed *s*-passive is homophonous with the verb *finnas* (‘exist’).⁷ One might expect that the passive meaning of *finna* would be expressed using the *bli*-form.

⁵ The PAROLE corpus is tagged for morphosyntactic information, including passive *s*-forms. In order to search for occurrences of *bli* + *perfect participle* I used search terms such as the one in (i).

(i) **”(bli|blir|blev|blivit)” [0,4] [word="tala.*" & msd="AF.*"] within S**
This returns all uses of the perfect participle *talad*, *talade*, *talat* which occur after a form of the verb *bli*, separated by zero to four words.

⁶ If you use a larger corpus such as the 60 million word Language Bank of Swedish, you find maybe 1-2 examples of *bli*-forms of these verbs. A more thorough investigation should be based on the larger corpus, but for this preliminary overview, the PAROLE corpus is sufficient.

⁷ Historically there is clearly a connection between the two uses, but synchronically *finnas* (exist) is a distinct verb.

This form is available, but this strategy doesn't appear to be very common. Only one example was found in the PAROLE corpus, given in (20).

- (20) att en annan bomb hade **blivit funnen** och desarmerad i Jerusalem (S)
that another bomb had BLIVIT found and desarmed

I suspect that *finna* in the passive is replaced by other lexical items such as *hitta* and *påträffa* where the *s*-forms are not blocked.

2.4.2. Lexical differentiation

When you look at concordances of verbs that occur in both passives, you often see a tendency towards lexical differentiation. If the active verb has two or more senses, it is often the case that the different senses are expressed with different passives. As a brief illustration of this, consider the Swedish verb *anta* which has the three senses 'accept', 'admit (to a course)' and 'assume'. Some examples are shown in (21).

- (21) a när deklARATIONEN om kvinnors rättigheter **antogs** av FN (S)
when the.declaration of women's rights accepted-S by UN
- b Karin Johnsson **blev antagen** som första utländska elev
Karin Johnsson BLEV admitted as (the)first foreign student
- c Inlärningen **antas bli** mer effektiv om man delar upp skolklasserna
the.instruction assume-S become more effective if one divides up ...

Looking at all occurrences of passive forms of *anta*, the senses correlate with the forms in the following way:

- (22) a In the sense 'accept', *s*-passive was used in 98%
b In the sense 'admit', *bli*-passive was used in 90%
c In the sense 'assume', *s*-passive was used in 100%

We will return to this issue in section 6.

2.5. Syntactic restrictions

The final type of factor that we will consider has to do with syntactic configuration. Are there particular configurations which require (or block) one of the forms, regardless of the use of the utterance and the particular verb chosen? I believe that this is the case and will here give two examples that seem to be relevant in Swedish. In section 7 we will look at how these restrictions interact with other factors.

2.5.1. Raising verbs

Verbs that occur in the syntactic context [_ NP VP [+INF]] are particularly interesting. These verbs are divided into (object) *control* verbs and (object) *raising* verbs. Control verbs like *tvinga* ('force') and *hindra* ('prevent') assign a semantic role to the NP which at the same time controls the missing subject of the infinitival VP. For raising verbs like *anse* ('consider') and *anta* ('assume'), the NP is not a semantic argument of the raising verb but only expresses the role of the subject of the VP. In Swedish, control verbs occur in both passives but the *s*-passive is about 10 times more frequent than the *bli*-passive. However, passive raising verbs in Swedish only appear in the *s*-form, as shown in (23). Note that *anta* in the active only takes a finite complement.

- (23) a Vi antar att problemet är löst (S)
we assume that the.problem i solved
b *Vi antar problemet vara löst
we asume the.problem be solved
c Problemet **antas** vara löst
problem-DEF assume-S be solved
d *Problemet **blir antaget** vara löst
problem-DEF BLI assumed be solved

2.5.2. Impersonal passives

All three languages allow impersonal passives and passive presentational constructions as in (26) and (27). In Swedish these constructions require the *s*-passive, as shown. In the other languages, the *bli*-passive is sometimes preferred, when other factors interact (see section 7.4.).

- (24) a Det **dansades** på bryggan (S)
it danced-S on the.jetty
'There was dancing on the jetty'
b *Det **blev dansat** på bryggan
- (25) a Det **dracks** mycket öl den kvällen (S)
it drunk-S much beer that evening
'A lot of beer was drunk that evening'
b *Det **blev drucket** mycket öl den kvällen

2.6. Summary

After this brief overview of the kind of factors that are able to affect the choice of passives in the Scandinavian languages, we will look in more detail at how important they are in the different languages. We will also try to identify cases where the different factors may run into conflict.

3. The form-function correlation

In this section we will look at how tight the correlation is between the form of the passive and the function of the utterance. We will first look at utterances with only a passive verb and then look at the interaction between modals and passives.

3.1. 'Bare' passives

As we have seen, the Danish and Norwegian grammatical tradition maintains that the primary use of the *s*-passive is in normative, generic utterances where the temporal anchoring is unimportant. The *bli*-passive on the other hand is used to report individual, completed events. This contrast in use is apparent e.g. in example (2) from Western, repeated here:

- (2) Fluesoppen spises ikke (er ikke spiselig; (N)
toadstool-DEF eat-S not (is not edible;
men allikevel blir den kanskje undertiden spist).
but still BLI it maybe off and on eaten)
'The toadstool should not be eaten, but off and on it gets eaten'

Let us look at the way Western indicates the intended interpretation of the first clause *fluesoppen spises ikke*. He paraphrases this as *er ikke spiselig* ('is not edible') a paraphrase which clearly conveys a modal component which could be rendered 'the toadstool should not be eaten'. Is the fact that the clause gets this modal interpretation due to the *s*-passive? I suspect that it is partly due to the context in which the sentence occurs, for instance in a biology textbook or in a cookery book. In this context it is natural to interpret the statement as expressing a general fact about this particular mushroom. Similarly, the other contexts we identified for the *s*-passive, viz. in recipes, in grammar books, in advertisements, on signs and as warnings, are all contexts which invite a particular type of interpretation, i.e. as a norm or instruction to be obeyed. The question then becomes whether this type of interpretation is really something that is conveyed by the *s*-passive *per se* or whether it is an interpretation that is due to the context of the linguistic expression. The answer to this question, I think, depends on the language. In Danish and Norwegian the correlation between form and function seems to be so tight that the use of an *s*-passive automatically carries with it interpretational effects such as normativity or genericity. In Swedish on the other hand, this is not the case. Here the interpretation of the *s*-passive is much more context dependent as the following contrasting examples show.

Signs in Swedish always take the *s*-passive (28a). But the *s*-passive can also be used to report an individual event (28b), or be embedded under a verb of perception as in (28c).

- (28) a Dörren **öppnas** utåt. (S)
the.door open-S out
b När Lisa ringde på klockan, **öppnades** dörren.
when Lisa rang the bell, opened-S the.door
c Vi såg dörren **öppnas**.
we saw the.door open-S

It seems reasonable to assume that the argument of a perception verb is an event. (28c) thus shows that the *s*-passive in Swedish can be used to describe an individual event. Interestingly enough the Danish and Norwegian counterparts are ungrammatical.

- (29) a *Vi så vinduet **åbnes** (D,N)
we saw the.window open-S
 b Vi så vinduet **blive åbnet**
- (30) a Jag hör sällan dörren **öppnas** (S)
I hear seldom the.door open-S
 b *Jeg hører sjældent døren **åbnes** (D)
I hear seldom the.door open-S
 c ? Jeg hører sjelden døra **åpnes** (N)
I hear seldom the.door open-S

I take this contrast in grammaticality (between the unavailable *s*-passive and the fully acceptable *bli*-passive) as evidence that the *s*-passive in Danish is not compatible with a single event interpretation. In Swedish, the *s*-passive is not inherently associated with a particular interpretation and can be used both in contexts which invoke a generic-normative interpretation and in contexts where an event interpretation is most natural. The situation in Norwegian seems to have changed from being more or less like the Danish system at the time of Western's grammar, to a contemporary system where the *s*-passive can be used in more contexts. Whereas there still seems to be a preference for using the *bli*-passive for single event descriptions, the *s*-passive is not impossible in the same way as it apparently is in Danish.⁸

The fact that the *s*-passive in Swedish is used for reporting individual events also shows up in the past tense, as in the following example from Heltoft (1994: (26)) who notes that in Danish you have to use a *bli*-passive.

- (31) a Den ryska ubåten **hittades** på botten av Stockholms skärgård (S)
the russian submarine found-S on the bottom of Stockholm's archipelague
 b Den russiske ubåd **blev fundet** på bunden af Stockholms skærgård (D)
the russian submarine BLEV found on the bottom of Stockholm's archipelague

However, given that the availability of past tense *s*-passives is very limited in Danish, the preference for the *bli*-passive may be due to this factor. The examples in (29)-(30) use infinitival *s*-passives, and there the ungrammaticality can not be due to a form being unavailable.

⁸ I am grateful to Kjell Johan Sæbø for pointing this out to me. In connection with a course at the University of Oslo in 1992, the students extracted all passive sentences out of a 40 000 word bokmål text. They found that the *s*-passive was 4-6 times more frequent than the *bli*-passive. More interestingly, when they tried to replace one passive with the other, they found that all *bli*-passives could be replaced by *s*-passives without significant choice of meaning, but not the other way round.

Another example illustrating this difference was brought to my attention by Thorstein Fretheim who had heard (32a) on Swedish radio. To Swedish listeners, this conveyed a descriptive report of something that regularly happens.

- (32) a Varje år **dödas** omkring 550 personer i trafiken (S)
every year kill-S around 550 people in the.traffic
 ‘Every year around 550 people are killed in traffic’
- b Hvert år **blir** omtrent 550 mennesker **drept** i trafiken. (N)
every year BLI around 550 people killed in the.traffic

But Thorstein’s Norwegian coloured interpretation was that there must be a rule in Sweden to the effect that every year 550 people should die on the roads and somehow the Swedes make sure that this happens. In order to convey the actual Swedish interpretation in Norwegian, one would have to phrase the utterance as in (32b), with a *bli*-passive.

3.1.1. ‘Bare’ passives as a mood indicator in Danish

As we saw in section 2.1.1., Heltoft (1994) and Heltoft & Falster Jakobsen (1996) (henceforth H&FJ) propose that the choice of passive reflects a intentional choice of mood: the *s*-passive is used for objective, speaker independent mood, and the *bli*-passive is used for speaker dependent mood. According to the authors this difference shows up in simple sentences with dynamic verbs as in (33) (cf H&FJ (7)).

- (33) a Inledningen **skrives** til sidst (D)
the.introduction write-S last
 ‘The introduction is to be written last’
- b Inledningen **bliver skrevet** til sidst (D)
the.introduction BLI written last
 ‘The introduction will be written last’

The present tense *s*-passive in (33a) indicates that this is a general rule for writing books, or a regulation imposed by someone else. The *bli*-passive in (33b) on the other hand indicates that this is the speaker’s prediction of what will happen.

From the examples discussed so far one might conclude that the *s*-passive is never used to describe individual events in Danish. According to H&FJ, this is correct as far as *actual* individual events go, but the *s*-passive can also be used to describe singular events in fictional mood. Cf (34) (from Heltoft 1994:(7)).

- (34) Langsomt **drejes** nøglen om. Håndtaget **trykkes** ned og døren går op. (D)
slowly turn-S the.key around the.handle press-S down and the.door opens

Apparently the choice of the *s*-passive here clearly conveys that this is part of a story. The Swedish counterpart of (34) could be used to describe an actual event, but not so in Danish.

3.2. Interaction between passives and modal/temporal auxiliaries

As many traditional grammars are aware, there is a systematic interaction between the choice of passive and the interpretation of the modal (cf Mikkelsen 1911:383). This is also one of the main topics in H&FJ, from where I will take several examples.⁹ The generalisation seems to be that in utterances where a modal can have both a root and an epistemic interpretation, then a *bli*-passive in the complement phrase forces the epistemic reading, whereas an *s*-passive in the complement favours the non-epistemic interpretation. In this section we will look at the three verbs *kan*, *skal* and *vil* in Danish and then look at some corpus data from Swedish and Norwegian to see whether the interpretational differences we find in Danish are relevant in these languages as well.

3.2.1. *kan*

H&FJ use the near minimal pair in (35), their (13), to illustrate that after *kan* in Danish, a *bli*-passive gets an epistemic (subjective) interpretation whereas the *s*-passive gets a non-epistemic (non-subjective) reading.

- (35) a Kaninerne kan **blive spist** af ræven *epistemic* (D)
the rabbits KAN BLI be eaten by the fox
'The rabbits may be eaten by the fox'
- b Spidsmus kan ikke **spises** *non-epistemic*
shrews KAN not eat-S
'Shrews cannot be eaten (i.e. are inedible)'

This difference has been noted for Swedish as well. SAG cites the following examples (§26d).

- (36) a Man kan **bli påkörd** *epistemic* (S)
one KAN BLI run-over
'You may be run over'
- b *Man kan **påköras**
- c Kursen kan **tenteras** *non-epistemic*
the.course KAN examine-S
'It is possible to be examined on this course'
- d *Kursen kan **bli tenterad**

(36a) is most naturally interpreted as an epistemic modal and only the *bli*-passive is possible. In (36c) on the other hand, the root interpretation is more plausible, and it must be expressed with an *s*-passive.¹⁰

⁹ In this article the discussion of the choice of passive is embedded in a comprehensive theory of mood in Danish which I will not be able to discuss within the scope of this report.

¹⁰ I suspect that other factors are also relevant in these examples. For instance, the animate subject of (36a) presumably has some control of the situation whereas the inanimate subject of (36c) cannot exercise control.

To see whether this interpretational difference is systematically realised in the predicted fashion, I looked at occurrences of *kan* followed by either a passive infinitive in *s*-form or *bli* followed by a perfect participle. It turned out that it was much more common for *kan* to be followed by an *s*-passive (more than 1000 occurrences) than a *bli*-passive (around 60 occurrences).¹¹ As far as I can tell from my preliminary investigation of these data, one of the predictions is borne out, namely that *kan* followed by an *s*-passive has a non-epistemic interpretation. A few examples are shown in (37).

- (37) a ... demonstrerar hur informationsteknologin kan **användas** (S)
demonstrate how the.information-technology KAN use-S
 inom samhälle och näringsliv.
within society and commerce
- b Bara vattenkraften kan **produceras** till ett lägre genomsnittspris
only the.hydro-power KAN produce-S to a lower average-price
 'If only the hydro-electric power could be produced at a lower average price'

The majority of the *bli*-examples clearly had an epistemic reading (38a,b), but some were ambiguous between a root and an epistemic reading as in (38c). Note that this example contains the verb *anta* in the sense 'admit'. We saw earlier that this sense is predominantly expressed with a *bli*-passive, cf (21)-(22).

- (38) a Reversen kan **bli underkänd** av skattemyndigheterna (S)
the.IOU KAN BLI not-passed by the.tax-authorities
 The tax authorities may not accept the IOU'
- b Vi kan **bli utplånade** av araberna
we KAN BLI extinguished by the.arabs
- c ...om de vet att de kan **bli antagna** på högskolan. (S)
if they know that they can BLI admitted in the.university
 'If they know that they have the qualifications necessary to be accepted
 'If they know that they may be accepted

However, there were also some examples where KAN + *bli*-passive can not be given an epistemic interpretation. One example is given in (39a). The epistemic interpretation, paraphrased in (39b), seems impossible. (39c), suggested by Joakim Nivre, is a more appropriate paraphrase.

- (39) a Antalet patienter som kan **bli botade** ... ökar
the.number patients that KAN BLI cured ... increases
 'The number of patients that can be cured increases'
- b * 'the number of patients that, as far as I know, will possibly be cured ... increases'
- c The number of patients that, given their physical condition and the

¹¹ One limitation of the web interface to PAROLE that I used is that it only returns the 1000 first hits, without randomisation. The results reported in the text are based on rather limited analyses of the concordances obtained and need to be verified by more detailed investigations.

current state of medical knowledge and hospital resources, etc., have a chance of being cured (regardless of the state of my knowledge) ... increases.

A search in the 15 million word tagged Norwegian (bokmål) corpus yielded similar results. There were around 4000 occurrences of *kan* followed by an *s*-infinitive and as far as I can tell from a quick look at these, they all had the root interpretation (40). Amongst the significantly fewer *bli*-passives, some had the predicted epistemic reading (41), but there were some that seem only to have a root interpretation (42).

- (40) Venner kan ikke **kjøpes** for penger og gull. (N)
friends KAN not buy-S for money or gold
- (41) a ...å få gislene løslatt. De kan **bli drept** når som helst (N)
to get the.hostages freed they KAN BLI killed any time
 b Vikingskipet kan **bli fylt** med vann.
the.viking-ship KAN BLI filled with water
- (42) ...halvt år før de nye forslagene kan **bli vedtatt**. (N)
half year before the new proposals KAN BLI adopted

Unfortunately I have not yet had access to a tagged Danish corpus, so I have not been able to look at a wider range of Danish data.

3.2.2. *skal*

According to H&FJ the choice of passive also brings out two distinct readings of *skal*. When followed by *bli*-passive, *skal* indicates the speaker's (subjective) prediction of what will happen (43a), whereas the *s*-passive brings out a deontic reading (obligation) (cf H&FJ (16)).

- (43) a Denne postej skal **blive spist** inden ugens udgang *prediction* (D)
this paté SKAL BLI eaten before the.week 's end
 'This paté will be eaten before the week end'
- b Denne postej skal **spises** inden ugens udgang *deontic*
this paté SKAL eat-S before the.week's end
 'This paté is to be eaten before the week end'

A search in the Swedish PAROLE corpus shows again that *ska* + *bli*-passive is less frequent (around 60) than *ska* + *s*-passive (> 1000). In most cases *ska* + *bli*-passive expresses a prediction, but it doesn't have to be the speaker's subjective judgment. It can be part of a report of some planned event.

- (44) a Sara från Syrien har just fått veta att hon ska **bli avvisad** från Sver. (S)
Sara from Syria has just got to know that she SKA BLI expelled from
 b ...eftersom fler och fler säger att de ska **bli uppkopplade**
since more and more say that they SKA BLI connected

Most of the *ska* + *s*-passive express an obligation, as predicted, but there are exceptions:

- (45) a Jordbruksverket oroar sig för att också Sverige ska **drabbas** (S)
the.agriculture-department worry for that also Sweden SKA affect-S
 ‘The Department of Agriculture are worried that Sweden also will be affected’
- b Stockholmskantaten ska **uppföras** våren 1998 i Berwaldhallen
the.Stockholm-cantata SKA perform-S spring 1998
- c Frågor som ska **behandlas** är bland annat vilka fritidsaktiviteter
questions that SKA take-up-S are among other things which ...
 ‘The questions that we plan to take up at the meeting...’
 ‘The questions that ought to be taken up (for which this is the appropriate meeting)’

To me, (45c) is ambiguous between a pure plan reading and an obligation reading as shown by the paraphrases.

It looks like there are tendencies in Swedish which agree with the Danish pattern, but we don’t find the strict complementary distribution that H&FJ claim obtains in Danish. I have not yet been able to study the Norwegian distribution in detail, but the situation seems to be like in Swedish, i.e. strong tendencies towards the predicted readings but a not negligible number of examples with other interpretations. The question then becomes whether Danish corpus data would be as systematic as H&FJ claim or more like what we see in the Swedish and Norwegian corpus data.

3.2.3. *vil*

In Danish and Norwegian, *vil* is ambiguous between a volitional (control) verb, which can be translated by ‘want’ and a temporal auxiliary (raising) verb, corresponding to English ‘will’. In Swedish, *vill* only has the volitional sense. The interesting question now becomes: which sense goes with which passive? According to H&FJ, the subjective, epistemic or volitional interpretation should cooccur with the *bli*-passive. However, this turns out to be incorrect. The volitional interpretation is readily available with the *s*-passive, whereas the *bli*-passive tends to prompt the future interpretation, as noted already in Mikkelsen (1911: 383) from where the examples in (46) are taken.

- (46) a Han vil **roses** *volition* (D)
he VIL praise-S
 ‘He wants to be praised’
- b Han vil **blive rost** *future*
he VIL BLI praised
 ‘He will be praised’

(46b) fits in with H&FJ's system in that it can be interpreted as the speaker's subjective prediction about what will happen, but it presumably does not express any subjective wish.

The situation in Norwegian is supposed to be the same as in Danish. However, the corpus data is not as clear, as one might have expected. Consider the example in (47), from a Bergen newspaper.

- (47) Begge disse fergene vil **tas** ut i streiken *future* (N)
both these ferries VIL take-S out in the.strike
 'Both these ferries will be taken out in the strike'

Despite the form, this can only be interpreted as involving the future auxiliary, since ferries are not things that can have wishes.

As mentioned earlier, the *s*-passive is not used in nynorsk. Here both the future and the volition reading are expressed with the *bli*-passive, as shown in (47'). The *s*-form in (47'b) is considered 'not pure'.

- (47') a Per vil **bli sent** til Odde *volition or future* (Nynorsk)
Per VIL BLI sent to Odde
 'Per wants to be sent to Odde'
 'Per will be sent to Odde'

- b ^{??}Per vil **sendast** til Odde

In Swedish, *vill* is only a control verb meaning 'want'. It seems to be more common with *bli*-passive complements, provided that the missing subject position is controllable (cf (11) above). However there are a few examples with *s*-passives from the PAROLE corpus. More research is needed into when they occur. Is it for instance an accident that many of the attested examples involve a negative?

- (48) a ... en symbol för "det flummiga" som kyrkan inte vill **besudlas** av (S)
a symbol for the flakey that the.church not VIL tarnish-S by
 'a symbol for flakeyness that the church doesn't want to be tarnished by'
- d Det är väl egentligen ingen av oss som vill **påminnas** om
it is PRT really noone of us that VIL remind-S
 det hemska året 2001
the horrible year 2001
 'Nobody here really wants to be reminded of the horrible year 2001, do they?'

3.3. Summary

At first glance it looks like passive forms in Danish and Norwegian are more clearly defined in terms of their function than in Swedish. In Danish and Norwegian, a particular form carries with it a restriction on function whereas this is not so in Swedish. Here it seems that the context of the utterance is more important for determining its function. This applies both to 'bare' passives and to passives occurring as complements of modals. With the help of corpus data, we were able to

document a certain amount of variability in Swedish, and to some extent in Norwegian, which is not accounted for by the form-function correlation.

4. The missing tense forms

In this section we will briefly address the following question. Given that *s*-passives are only productively used in the present tense and as infinitives in Danish and Norwegian, what effects does this have on the range of possible interpretations? The morphological unavailability of *s*-passive forms outside the present tense paradigm is clearly an important factor. Grammar textbooks in Danish and Norwegian tend to organise their presentation of the passive according to tense, presumably because this is considered so fundamental.

Heltoft (1994) and H&FJ don't consider this problematic. They point out that there is an expected use of the past tense *s*-passive, namely in reports on norms that held previously, as in (49) from Heltoft 1994: (20)¹²

- (49) a I Kina **serveredes** maden tidligere aldrig med andet end vand (D)
in China servere-PAST-S the food earlier never with other than water
"In China food was earlier only served with water"

Mikkelsen (1911:382) conveys the impression that it is straight forward to replace the *s*-passive by a *bli*-passive in the past tense. consider his example, given in (50).

- (50) a Det **siges** i hele byen, at han skal skilles fra konen. *present* (D)
it say-S in whole village that he SKA
b Det **blev sagt** i hele byen, at han var rejst bort på grund af gæld. *past*
it BLEV said in whole village that he had left because of debt

Nevertheless the non-occurrence of *s*-passive forms in the past and perfect most likely has an impact. My impression is that in the past and perfect tenses, the passive is often replaced by impersonal constructions with *man*. ('one'). It would be an interesting topic in itself to look at how non-present passive constructions are rendered in Danish and Norwegian, for instance by using parallel corpora.

5. Semantic properties

From the point of view of the project *Comparative Semantic for Nordic Languages*, this section is central. It should contain an investigation of which semantic factors are relevant in each of the languages, and to what extent are they relevant in the other languages as well. Is there more or less variation regarding the semantic factors than e.g. morphological and syntactic factors? Most of this work still remains to be done. Here I will just note a few observations.

¹² It is maybe worth pointing out that the order of the morphemes on the verb don't mirror the order of interpretation. (49) is normally interpreted as in (ii), not as in (i).

- (i) *GEN PAST (It is normally the case that food in China was only served with water)
(ii) PAST GEN (It was normally the case that)

5.1. Aktionsart and aspect

It has been suggested that the distinction between stative and dynamic aktionsart, or between imperfective and perfective aspect, is central to the choice of passive forms. H&FJ (section 2.6) don't agree with this and point out that the choice of passive form cuts across traditional aktionsart categories. For instance, it is not the case that all dynamic verbs only appear in the *bli*-passive, nor is it true that the *bli*-passive necessarily conveys perfective aspect. Lødrup (in prep.) argues that aspect is only relevant for *bli*-passive, and uses aspectual facts to explain why many verbs that take an experiencer subject cannot be used with a *bli*-passive.

5.2. Semantic roles

One interesting case is perception verbs. All the languages use the *s*-passive in sentences like (9a), repeated here in (51a), together with the Norwegian parallel.

- (51) a Klockorna **hörs** vida omkring SAG §3b (S)
the.bells hear-S widely
'The bells can be heard from far away'
- b Klokkene **høres** vidt omkring (N)

Note that the examples in (51) don't entail that someone actually hears the bells. Rather the sentence has a modal flavour, *the bells can be heard*. Compare this use with the examples in (52) and (53) which are intended to be reports of an actual event.

- (52) a Nödpetet **hörs** (av en fiskare) *actual event* (S)
the.help-cry hear-S by a fisherman
'The call for help is heard by a fisherman'
- b *Nödpetet **blir hört** (av en fiskare)
- c Nödpetet **hördes** av en fiskare
the.help-cry heard-S by a fisherman
- d *Nödpetet **blev hört** (av en fiskare)
- (53) a Nödpetet **blir hört** (av en fisker) *actual event* (N)
the.help-cry BLI heard by a fisherman
- b ??Nödpetet **høres** (av en fisker)
- c Nödpetet **ble hört** (av en fisker)
the.help-cry BLEV heard by a fisherman
- d ??Nödpetet **hörtes** (av en fisker)

When we compare the Swedish and Norwegian examples here, we note several things. In the reading reporting an actual event, Swedish uses *s*-passive, whereas Norwegian prefers the *bli*-passive, although the *s*-passive is not impossible. The explanation for this difference has nothing to do with the semantic roles involved since they presumably have not changed. Rather other factors are coming into play that are relevant for the choice of passive. In order to report an individual (completed)

event, Norwegian prefers the *bli*-passive. In Swedish, the *s*-passive can very well be used for this purpose. In this particular example, the *s*-form in Swedish sounds more natural than the *bli*-passive. The reason for this is probably that *bli hörd* has acquired more specialised senses. It is used either in the sense ‘be heard as a witness’ or ‘be recognised or taken seriously’. This is then a case where the lexical differentiation in Swedish outweighs other factors. The judgment for the present tense carry over to the past tense for both languages. The past tense form *hørtes* exists in Norwegian but the periphrastic form *ble hørt* sounds more natural.

5.3. Abstract versus concrete

Some authors identify the use of the *s*-passive with a more abstract use of a verb, whereas the *bli*-passive is seen to express concrete uses (Thorell 1973). This may be related to the use of the *s*-passive for generic events and the *bli*-passive for individual events. It also seems relevant to the way the arguments of the verb are interpreted. Take the Swedish verb *överfalla* (‘attack’) which may be used both with a concrete and an abstract agent argument.

- (54) a Rånarna överföll honom (S)
 the.robbers attacked him
 b Ånger överföll honom
 remorse attacked him

With a concrete agent, both passives are possible, as shown in (55), but in the more metaphorical use, only the *s*-passive is possible (The examples are taken from Lindfors Viklund (1997)).

- (55) a Han **överfölls** av rånare (S)
 he attacked-S by robbers
 b Han **blev överfallen** av rånare
 he BLEV attacked by robbers
- (56) a Han **överfölls** av ånger
 he attacked-S by remorse
 ‘He was taken over by remorse’
 b *Han **blev överfallen** av ånger

Lindfors Viklund (1997) also mentions some verbs which are almost exclusively used with abstract agents. Only the *s*-passive is available.

- (57) a Han **genomförs** av en rysning (S)
 he went-through-S by a shudder
 ‘A shudder went through him’
 b *Han **blev genomfaren** av en rysning

I believe that Danish and Norwegian counterparts to the data in (55)-(57) behave in a similar fashion, but I have not had time to investigate this in detail yet. This would mean that in addition to general factors having to do with completed vs. incomplete

action and mood, we also need to recognise semantic distinctions having to do with whether the agent is concrete or abstract.

5.4. Control versus single/repeated events

I mentioned in section 2.3. that one factor that seems to influence the choice of passive in Swedish is whether the subject (understood or overt) has control over the event. If the subject is perceived as able to influence the situation, the *bli*-passive is preferred, as shown in (11), repeated here.

- (11) a Representanten försökte **bli omvald** (S)
the.representative tried BLI reelected
 b ??Representanten försökte **omväljas**
the.representative tried reelect-S

One thing that needs further investigation is how important this factor is in current Danish and Norwegian. Earlier, this factor was apparently not relevant compared with the distinction between singular and repeated actions. Mikkelsen (1911:384) mentions the following contrast.

- (58) a Hun kan godt lide at **roses** af folk *repeated event* (D)
she can well suffer to praise-S by people
 ‘She likes to be praised by people’
 b Udsigterne til at **blive rost** ved denne lejlighed *singular event*
the.prospects to to-INF BLI praised on this occasion
 var ikke store
were not great
 ‘The prospects of being prased on this occasion were not great’

However, according to my Danish informants, (58a) is no longer used; instead the *bli*-form is preferred. The same applies to attitude verbs like *bang for* (‘be afraid to’). This makes the Danish pattern more similar to present-day Swedish where the *bli*-form is preferred in both in both examples. The *s*-form is not impossible, which suggests that controllability is a rather weak factor, which may be overridden by other factors such as lexical preferences.

- (59) a Hon tycker om att **bli lovordad** *repeated event* (S)
she likes to BLI praised
 b Utsikterna att **bli lovordad** vid detta tillfälle *singular event*
the.prospects to BLI praised on this occasion
 var inte goda
were not good

5. 5. Summary

One factor that seems to cut across the various semantic factors mentioned here is animacy. According to SAG, inanimate subjects tend to cooccur with *s*-passives whereas animate subjects are more common with *bli*-passives. This preference is

probably balanced by other factors, but it is probably significant for Swedish and probably more relevant for Danish than previously thought.

6. More on lexical restrictions

How can you find out if a particular verb occurs in both passives or not? Some grammars contain explicit lists of verbs that lack one or the other form (e.g. Mikkelsen (1911), SAG) but it is rare that this information is also available in dictionaries. Here I find the large corpora to be very valuable as you can tell rather easily if a verb is used in a particular form or not. So far I have been able to confirm that certain fairly frequent telic verbs in Swedish are not used in the *bli*-passive at all. I have not found any verb that is *only* used in the *bli*-passive, but there are some that are more frequent in the *bli*-passive. These include adversative verbs such as *köra över* ('run over')¹³ This verb also occurs in the *s*-passive, but then only in a metaphorical sense.¹⁴

- (60) a Hon **blev överkörd** av ett expresståg (S)
she BLEV over-run by an express-train
 'She was run over by an express train'
- b När ärendet drogs i kommunstyrelsen **kördes Björn över**, ...
when the issue pulled-S in the council-board drove-S B. over
 'When the issue came up in the council, Björn was overruled'

The fact that the *bli*-passive is preferred in adversative constructions is probably not an accident, but seems to follow a common typological pattern (Ö.Dahl, p.c.). More research is needed here as well as into similarities with the use of the *get* passive in English.

In order to be able to look looking at the effect of other factors, it is of course important to use verbs that occur in both passive forms. I am compiling a list of such verbs in Swedish. Some verbs that are productively used in both forms are given in the following table.

<i>acceptera</i>	accept	<i>framföra</i>	present
<i>avbryta</i>	interrupt	<i>mörda</i>	murder
<i>behandla</i>	treat	<i>råna</i>	rob
<i>bjuda</i>	invite	<i>rädda</i>	save
<i>erbjuda</i>	offer	<i>välja</i>	choose

¹³ In Swedish, the perfect participle normally incorporates any particle or adverb, whereas these may be separated in the *s*-passive, as shown in (60). Danish and Norwegian often use the separate forms in the participle construction as well. I have not yet investigated to what extent the ability of the participle to be prefixed to the verb affects the choice of passive.

¹⁴ The PAROLE corpus also contains a few examples where the metaphorical sense is expressed by the *bli*-passive.

- (i) ett resultat av att hans vilja blev överkörd
a result of that his wish BLEV over-run
 'a consequence of the fact that his wishes were overruled'

One might argue that this shows that the *bli*-passive is the 'unmarked' passive for this particular verb and that this explains why it generalises to the metaphorical sense.

6.1. Verbs with propositional complements

An interesting group of verbs are those which take finite propositional complements such as *anta* ('assume') and *inse* ('realise'). These often occur in the passive in which case the propositional complement becomes a subject. Having a sentential subject in preverbal position is possible (61b) but tends to be avoided. When another constituent occupies the initial position, the sentential subject will follow the verb (61c). In other cases an expletive subject is often inserted as in (61d). As far as I am aware, this whole lexical class only allows the *s*-passive in Swedish.

- (61) a Man antar att sossarna vinner valet (S)
one assumes that the.social-democrats winn the.election
- b Att sossarna vinner valet **antas** allmänt
that the.soc-dem winn the.election assume-S generally
'It is generally assumed that the Social Democrats win the election'
- c Allmänt **antas** att sossarna vinner valet.
generally assume-S that the.soc-dem win
- d Det **antas** att sossarna vinner valet
it assume-s that the.soc-dem win
- e *Det **blir antaget** att sossarna vinner valet

Danish and Norwegian allow more variation as shown in (62) and (63).

- (62) a Det **antages** at serberne vil angribe (D)
it assume-S that the.serbs will attack
'It is generally assumed that ...'
- b Det **blir antaget** at serberne vil angribe
it BLI assumed that the.serbs will attack
'There are people who assume that ..., i.e. there are some actual events where people assume that ...'
- (63) a På den annen side **blir antatt** at Milosevic fortsatt har ... (N)
on the other side BLI assumed that M. still has
- b Det **blir antatt** at Milosevic står bak et nytt utspill
it BLI assumed that M stands behind a new move
- c Det **antas** at også mange av de 70 vitnene vil nekte
it assume-S that also many of the 70 witnesses will deny ...

Note that the different passives convey different meanings in Danish. (62a) is the normal way of reporting that something is generally assumed. (62b) can not be used to convey the meaning of (62a). To the extent that (62b) is used, it highlights the fact that there are actual assuming events.

I don't know whether there are corresponding interpretational differences associated with the Norwegian examples. A quick look in the corpus at Tekstlaboratoriet reveals that *antas* is about ten times more common than *bli antatt*.

It thus seems that there is a lexical restriction in Swedish concerning propositional verbs, probably characterisable in semantic terms, that is not directly relevant in the other languages.

6.2. *sägs* versus *bli sagt*

One of the relevant verbs in Swedish actually has both passives, namely *säga* (say). But when you look at a concordance of examples, it becomes obvious that there is also lexical differentiation at play. The *s*-passive of *säga* is very frequent. The form is used for the ‘general saying’ sense (64a), to report on the content of printed works etc (64b) and also in the sense of something concrete that gets uttered (64c).

- (64) a Det **sägs** att av erfarenhet blir man vis men inte rik (S)
it say-s that by experience you get wise but not rich
- b I FN:s deklaration om de mänskliga rättigheterna
in UN's declaration about the human rights
sägs att alla är berättigade till ...
say-S that all are entitled ...
- c Kan ni höra vad som **sägs**?
can you hear what that say-S
 ‘Can you hear what is (being) said?’

When we look at a concordance of *bli sagt* we only find the concrete sense, when the NP subject denotes that which is uttered, or rather isn't uttered, as the examples indicate.

- (65) a Inte mycket **blir sagt** under resan (S)
not much BLI said during the.journey
- b Något nytt **blir** inte **sagt**
something new BLI not said
- c Han påstår, att orden "nu och framgent" aldrig **blivit sagda**
he claims that the.words 'now and in the futre' never BLIViT said

Given that this sense can also be expressed with the *s*-form, replacing the *bli*-passives in (65) with an *s*-form is possible (66a). However, in the other senses associated with the *s*-form, the *bli*-form is impossible (66b).

- (66) a Inte mycket **sägs** under resan (S)
not much say-S during the.journey
- b *I FN:s deklaration **blir** det **sagt** att alla är berättigade ...
in UN's declaration BLI it said that all are entitled

We can contrast this systematic use of lexical differentiation in Swedish with the situation in Danish. There it seems that the option for lexical differentiation is smaller, given that the choice between the *s*-form and the *bli*-form often is a consequence of some other factor such as tense, as shown in (50).

6.3. *ses* versus *bli sedd*

It will be useful to look at some further data involving the frequent verb *se* ('see') in Swedish. Just as the English counterpart, *se* is highly polysemous. But when you sort the passive occurrences by form, an interesting pattern emerges. It turns out that the *s*-form is used for concrete seeing events (67a), when something is visible (67b), cf. (51a), as a bare infinitive taking verb (67c) and in a more abstract sense 'be seen as something' (67d).

- (67) a Tranorna **sågs** av 170000 personer (S)
the.cranes saw-S by 170000 people
b Här **ses** Bohustrafikens styrelseordförande Lennart J.
here see-S Bohus traffic board-director LJ
c I samma ögonblick **sågs** en man komma ut på balkongen
as same moment saw-S a man come out on the.balcony
d Socialdemokraterna **sågs** allmänt som lite maktfullkomliga
the.social democrates saw-S generally as somewhat

Compare these examples with some examples involving the *bli*-passive:

- (68) a EN KARL hade **blivit sedd** med diskförkläde i grannhuset (S)
a man had BLIVIT seen with a washing up apron in the.neighbour-house
b främlingen som ser utan att **bli sedd**
the.stranger that sees without to BLI seen
c absolut ingen anledning att oroa sig för att **bli sedd**
absolutely no reason to worry about to BLI seen
d men ständigt garderad för att **bli sedd** av butiksägaren
but always on the guard for to BLI seen by the.shop-owner

The examples in (68) all bring out a sense of *se* where it means 'to be noticed or observed'. *se* thus appears to provide another example of a case where the choice of passive differentiates between two senses in Swedish. To what extent are lexical restrictions and differentiation relevant in Danish and Norwegian? I don't have the full answer to this question as I have only looked at a few cases. *bli sedd* in Norwegian can clearly be used in a wider range of senses than the Swedish counterpart. Consider the data in (69) from the Bergen Tidende. Both these examples would have to be expressed with the *s*-form in Swedish.

- (69) a De er lysår unna oss og ifølge astronomer (N) (S: ses)
they are light-years away (from) and according to astronomers
"for svake til å **bli sett** med et nakent øye" .
to weak to BLI seen with a naked eye
b Filmen tåler nemlig å **bli sett** om igjen. (N) (S: ses)
the.film stands PRT to BLI seen again
'This film can very well be seen again'

6.4. Directions of differentiation

So far we have only looked at a few cases of lexical differentiation. Nevertheless it seems that this differentiation is not arbitrary but tends to follow the Danish/Norwegian patterns. When a Swedish verb is used with both passives, and when these have slightly different senses, it appears that the *s*-passive usually expresses a sense that involves iteration or progressivity (something is seen or heard on many occasions) whereas the *bli*-passive is used for senses that involve the result of an individual event (of having been seen or heard).¹⁵

7. Syntactic constructions

In addition to the functional, morphological, semantic and lexical factors discussed above, I think it is useful to distinguish a factor which I am calling ‘syntactic construction’. Although it may sometimes be difficult to distinguish the properties of a syntactic construction *per se* from contextual factors which determine whether a particular construction is used at all and from the lexical characterisation of e.g. verbs that may occur in the construction, I nevertheless think it is motivated to have a separate heading since I suspect that this factor is not equally relevant in all the languages under investigation. I will first look at verbs that occur in the syntactic context [_ NP XP] where the XP is interpreted as being predicated of the NP and then at constructions involving expletive subjects.

7.1. Raising verbs

We will first consider some cases of (object) raising in the three languages.

- (70) a Vi anser henne (vara) lämpligast (S)
we consider her be most suitable
b Hon **anses** vara lämpligast
she consider-S most suitable
c *Hon **blir ansedd** vara lämpligast
she BLI considered most suitable
- (71) a Hun **anses** for at være klog (D)
she say-S to be clever
b Hun **bliver anset** for at være klog
she BLI considered to be clever
- (72) a skelv som måles til 7 eller mer **anses** for å være kraftige skjelv (N)
tremors that measure 7 or more consider-S for to be strng tremors
b I dag er han tatt til nåde og **blir ansett** for å være en glimrende
today he has been pardoned and BLI considered for to be
en glimrende administrator
a brilliant administrator

¹⁵ I am grateful to Joakim Nivre for suggesting this generalisation.

In Swedish these verbs are construed with a bare infinitive or a predicative AP or PP and they only allow the *s*-passive. In Danish and Norwegian, these verbs tend to take an infinitive marker (*at, å*). Both passives are possible in Danish, but only the *s*-passive in Norwegian. Note also that *anses* in Danish requires the prepositional complementiser *for* which may mean that this is not a straightforward raising verb.

More research into the different syntactic patterns in the different languages is clearly needed, but it seems to me that the pattern of possible and impossible passive forms shown in (64)-(66) is independent of the use, the mood, semantic roles, lexical restrictions and other factors that we have looked at so far. Instead it seems to be a specific syntactic property of the languages which passives are available for (object) raising verbs.

7.2. Perception verbs

In Swedish perception verbs with infinitival complements only allow the *s*-passive, whereas with other complements both passives are allowed, possibly subject to some differentiation in the meaning.

- (73) a Per **hörs** öppna dörren (S)
Per hear-S open the.door
 b *Per **blir hörd** öppna dörren
Per BLI heard open the.door

An interesting case arises with the verb *se*. In section 6.3. we saw that *bli sedd* is normally interpreted as ‘to be noticed’. What happens if we want to express this sense of the verb together with an infinitival complement, i.e. a context where only the *s*-passive is possible? Which factor wins out? It turns out that the syntactic restriction is ‘stronger’ than the lexical in Swedish. There is no problem to express the intended reading with a subordinate temporal clause as in (74a), but (74b) is not possible. Presumably one has to use (74c) although this has other senses as well.

- (74) a Mannen **blev sedd** när han gick över gatan. (S)
the.man BLI seen when he crossed the street
 ‘The man was noticed when he crossed the street’
 b *Mannen **blev sedd** gå över gatan
the.man BLI seen cross street-DEF
 c Mannen **sågs** gå över gatan
the.man saw-S cross street-DEF

In Danish, perception verbs occur in both passives, and the choice of which passive form to use seems to follow the general rule regarding the choice of passives. (More work needed here¹⁶)

- (75) a Manden **bliver tit set** gå over gaden (D)
the.man BLI often seen go across the.street
 b Pensionister **ses** ikke mere fodre dyrene i parken

¹⁶ One difference between Danish and Swedish which may very well be relevant is that the perfect participle in Swedish agrees with the passive subject but not so in Danish.

retired see-S not anymore feed the.animals in the.park
 ‘You no longer see retired people feed the animals in the park’

In Norwegian the situation appears to be rather complex. According to one informant, passivising a perception verb with an infinitival complement is not very felicitous. The *bli*-passive is perceived as clumsy (76b) and the *s*-passive as impossible (76c). A circumlocution is preferred as in (76d) (cf (74a)).

- (76) a Jon ser mannen gå øver gaten (N)
Jon sees the.man go across the.street
 b ^{??}Mannen **blir sett** gå øver gaten
the.man BLI seen go across the.street
 c *Mannn **ses** gå øver gaten
the.man see-S go across the street
 d Mannen **blir sett** i det han går øver gaten
the.man BLI seen in that he walks across the.street

7.3. Presentational constructions

In this section we will look briefly at passives occurring in presentational (existential) constructions. In Danish, both passives can be used, as shown in the following example from H&FJ (1996: (39)).

- (77) a Der **drikkes** en tør hvidvin til forretten (D)
there drink-S a dry white-wine to the.first-course
 ‘A dry white wine will be drunk with the first course’
 b Der **bliver drukket** en tør hvidvin til forretten
there BLI drunk a dry white-wine to the.first-course
 ‘A dry white will be drunk with the first course’

Lars Heltoft (p.c.) confirms that (77a) would be used to report a general custom. It is the kind of statement you would find in a book on etiquette. (77b) is either a prediction of what will happen at a particular dinner or a report of what is actually drunk in general without implying that this follows a norm.

In Norwegian, both passives forms are also used in presentational constructions, as can be seen in the examples in (78), taken from the Oslo corpus. Again it seems that the choice is determined by other factors. (78a) could be a description of an individual event. (78b) reports on a rule or plan and (78c) describes the lack of some regular event. The *s*-passive in (78d) is maybe less clear and this is actually a case where the *bli*-passive could also be used (K.J.Sæbø p.c.).

- (78) a Det **blir delt ut** løpesedler mot rasisme (N)
it BLI distributed leaflets against racism
 b På avslutningen av festivalen skal det **deles ut** tre priser.
at the.end of the.festival shall it award-S three prizes
 c Så lenge det ikke **deles ut** kongepokal i kvinneklassen, ...
so long it not award-S king-trophy in the.woman-class

‘As long as no royal trophy is awarded in the women’s class, ...’

- d ... foreslår for selskapets generalforsamling at det **deles ut**
...*suggests to the.society’s general-meeting that it distribute-S*
et utbytte på kroner 1,50 pr aksje.
a dividend of crowns 1,50 per share

Turning finally to Swedish, it would of course be desirable to look at Swedish counterparts of the Danish and Norwegian examples. We would then find that presentational sentences with *dricks* and *delas ut* are OK but that no examples with *bli druckat* or *bli utdelat* can be attested in the corpus. However, this is not very revealing since it turns out that these verbs are not used in the *bli*-passive at all. We need to find a verb that is used in both forms and can also be used in a presentational construction. *erbjuda* (‘offer’) is a candidate.

- (79) a Knark har jag aldrig själv **blivit erbjuden** (S)
drugs have I never self BLIVIT offered
‘I myself have never been offered drugs’
- b Är ni intresserade av att köpa ett vodkamärke?
are you interested of to buy a vodka-brandname
-Om det **erbjuds** ett tillfälle, visst.
if there offer-s an opportunity, sure
‘Sure, if an opportunity arises.’
- c *Om det **blir erbjudet** ett tillfälle

(79a) shows that *erbjuda* is used in the *bli*-passive, (79b) is a presentational sentence in the *s*-passive. But the *bli*-passive is not possible in the presentational construction (79c).¹⁷ This is not just true for this verb. A search for *det blir|blev* followed by a perfect participle in the PAROLE corpus yielded hardly any hits. I conclude that this is not a lexical restriction in Swedish but a more general restriction on the syntactic construction as such.

In the previous section we looked at a case of conflict between lexical and syntactic factors in Swedish. Another potential conflict arises between the syntactic factor that favours the *s*-form in presentational constructions and the lexical factor that may require the *bli*-form in certain cases. Let us look at the choice between *sågas* and *bli sagt*, where the latter form is used preferably when you refer to concrete words that are actually said. Here it seems that the lexical factor is strong enough to override the syntactic restriction against *bli*-passives in presentational constructions. Note that the *s*-passive is also possible.

- (80) a Det **blev** inte så mycket **sagt** kanske (S)
it BLEV not so much said maybe
‘Maybe not very much was said’
- b Det **sades** inte så mycket
it said-S not so much

¹⁷ A closer look at the examples with *bli erbjuden* reveals that in all cases, it is an animate recipient that is the subject. The presentational constructions very rarely have an overt recipient, although it is possible. This may be a relevant factor in this case.

However this is not always the case. It seems to me that although *anta* in the sense ‘admit’ is normally expressed with the *bli*-form, the *s*-form is nevertheless preferred in presentational constructions. No examples of *bli antagen* with non-human subjects are attested in the PAROLE corpus.

- (81) a Det **antogs** ytterligare 20 elever (S)
it admitted-S another 20 pupils
 b ?*Det **blev antaget** ytterligare 20 elever
it BLEV admitted another 20 pupils

The presentational example in (80a) is actually an instance of a common pattern in Swedish involving negative objects and the *bli*-passive. Note that the negative object and some measure adverbials can occur before the participle. Other objects seem less felicitous in this construction and the *s*-passive is clearly preferred.

- (81') a Men då **blev** det ingenting **gjort** (S)
but then BLEV it nothing done
 ‘But nothing got done then’
 b Då blev **det** mycket **gjort**
then BLEV it a-lot done
 ‘A lot got done then’
 c Då **gjordes** det ett nytt försök
then did-S it a new attempt
 ‘A new attempt was made then’
 d ?* Då **blev** det **gjort** ett nytt försök
 e ?*Då **blev** det ett nytt försök **gjort**

7.4. Impersonal passives

The final construction we will look at is the so-called impersonal passive. The same pattern as for presentational constructions emerges. Danish and Norwegian allow both passives and the choice between them reflects the importance of other factors. Swedish only allows the *s*-passive, which does not by itself carry any connotations of normativity or genericity. H&FJ discuss the examples in (82)-(83), their (36)-(37).

- (82) a Der **snydes** (D)
there cheat-S
 ‘People/they cheat, as a rule’
 b Der **bliver snydt**
there BLI cheated
 ‘Actual cheating is going on’
 (83) a Her **rulles** (D)
here press-S

‘Pressing (using a mangle) offered’

- b Her **bliver rullet**
here BLI pressed
‘Pressing is (actually) going on’

In Swedish, only the *s*-passive is possible. (84a) can be used for the sense expressed by (82b) as well. If you want to make it clear that you are talking about the current situation, you would have to say something like (84c).

- (84) a Det **fuskas** (S)
it cheat-S
‘People/they cheat, as a rule’
‘Actual cheating is going on’
- b *Det **blir fuskat**
c Någon här fuskar
someone here cheats

Here are some Norwegian examples showing that it is the use of the utterance that determines the choice of passive. (85a) is from the Oslo corpus, (85b,c) are from Western (1921:164).¹⁸

- (85) a Til gjengjeld drikker nordmenn mer når det **blir drukket**. (N)
on the other hand drink Norwegians more when it BLI drunk
‘On the other hand, Norwegians drink more when drinking is on’
- b Der **drikkes** meget her i landet
there drink-S a-lot here in the.country
‘People drink a lot in this country’
- c Ved slike leiligheter **blir** der ikke stort **druknet**
on such occasions BLI there not much drunk
‘On such occasions, people don’t drink a lot’

7.5 Summary

The four syntactic constructions that we have looked at gave rather similar results. In Danish and Norwegian, the construction *per se* does not seem to be important; rather it is the other factors that determine which passive will be used. A complete analysis of Swedish, on the other hand, probably needs to refer to in which syntactic context the passive is going to be used. We found some examples of interesting interactions between lexical and syntactic factors in Swedish. I suspect that there may well be such interactions in Danish and Norwegian as well, but this awaits further research.

¹⁸ If you take the presence of an object (or derived subject) as characteristic for presentational constructions, then (85b) really belongs in the preceding section. However, for the present purpose, the distinction is not so important. Østen Dahl pointed out that this example normally is interpreted as a description of something factual, not something that should be the case according to a norm. The interpretation of (85b) thus differs from e.g. (32a). This is most likely due to the function of the impersonal passive construction.

8. Conclusion

One way to summarise my current understanding of what determines the choice of passive in the mainland Scandinavian languages is as follows. In Danish and to a somewhat lesser extent in Norwegian, the *form* determines the possible use and interpretation. If an *s*-passive is used, then the utterance will be interpreted e.g. as expressing a general norm, describing an incomplete event etc. If the context doesn't permit this interpretation, the form is judged unacceptable. This explains why the *s*-passive cannot be used in a context which is only compatible with an event interpretation, as shown in (29), repeated here.

- (29) a *Vi så vinduet **åbnes** (D,N)
we saw the.window open-S
b Vi så vinduet **blive åbnet**

In Swedish, on the other hand, the interpretation is largely determined by the *context*. If an *s*-passive occurs on a sign, it will be interpreted as a rule (28a), and when it occurs embedded under a perception verb, it will be interpreted as describing an individual event (28c).

- (28) a Dörren **öppnas** utåt. (S)
the.door open-S out
c Vi såg dörren **öppnas**.
we saw the.door open-S

For all three languages, the *availability* of the passive forms is relevant. But the availability seems to depend on different factors. In Danish and Norwegian, the main factor is the *tense*; *s*-passive is only productive in the present tense and in infinitives. In other tenses, *s*-passives are replaced by *bli*- forms with little or no effect on the interpretation. In Swedish, availability should rather be seen as a *lexical* fact. Certain verbs in Swedish lack the *bli*-passive altogether. Other verbs have both passive forms, but the senses may be restricted in a systematic fashion. I suspect that this factor may be relevant in Danish and Norwegian as well, but more research is required to investigate this. Another factor that appears to be significant in Swedish is whether the subject of the passive verb has any *control* over the situation. This is probably linked to animacy. The possible role of animacy in Danish and Norwegian needs to be explored.

Finally it looks like the *syntactic context* in which the passive occurs plays a more important role in Swedish than in Danish and Norwegian where other factors are more important for determining the actual form. These conclusions are by necessity rather tentative since there are many areas which I have not investigated in sufficient detail yet. But at least they provide a basis for investigating the interaction between the different factors more systematically.

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Corpora

Norwegian Text Archive at the University of Bergen <http://www.hit.uib.no/nta/>.

Oslo Corpus of Bokmål: <http://www.tekstlab.uio.no/>

Swedish PAROLE Corpus: <http://ldb20.svenska.gu.se/>.