PASSIVES IN STANDARD ARABIC:

The Enlightment from Relational Grammar

A.S.Abdel-Hafiz

INTRODUCTION:

This paper deals with the types of passives that Standard Arabic(SA) has.It is shown that there are two types of passives in this language: Personal passives(Section 2.2) and impersonal passives(Section(3.2). The former type involves the advancement of a direct object to subject. The latter type operates on unaccusative clauses only . In such a case a dummy is inserted as direct object which advances to subject. This analysis of impersonal passives is argued to be superior to another analysis-the Spontaneous Demotion-which does not posit any dummy insertion or advancement (cf.Section 3.2.1).

The discussion in this paper is conducted in the Framework of Relational Grammar(RG) as proposed by Perlmutter and Postal(1974;1983 a,1983 b,1983 c).[1]

RG(cf.Section 1) is chosen since it aspires to universality, that is, it states rules in such a way that they would be true of all (or most) languages of the world irrespective of word order or case system. For example, the passive rule formulated by RG (Section 2.1) would apply to such diverse languages as English, Arabic and Dyirbal (cf.Dixon 1972).

1- Relational Grammar: an Outline:

Relational Grammar(RG) was developed by Perlmutter and Postal(1974). The basic claim of RG is that syntactic rules should directly refer to the grammatical relations(GR) of elements in the sentence rather than to phrase markers as in Transformational Grammar(TG)(Chomsky 1962) or to semantic relations as in Case Grammar(Filmore 1968).

Grammatical relations in RG are taken to be primitives of grammatical theory: predicate(p). subject(1), direct object(2),indirect object(3), obliques(Obl)(e.g.Locative(loc);Instrumental.

(instr)etc.) and Chomeurs(cho). The chomeur
relation is borne by" nominals that bear no other
nominal clause relation at that level"(Gerdts
1984)[2].

These grammatical relations fall into two
classes: nuclear terms which include 1s,2s,3s and
non-terms,consisting of chomeurs and obliques[3].

According to RG, any syntactic structure must
refer to three things that are represented by three
elements in Relational NetworK.
(Perlmutter 1980:1981):

(a) The elements that bear relations to
each other: this is represented by
a set of nodes.

(b) The grammatical relation that is borne
by each element in the sentence: this
is shown by a set of R-signs.

(c) The levels at which each element bears
grammatical relations to the other;
this is indicated by a set of
co-ordinates.

In RG, the relation between linguistic
elements can be described in terms of nodes(e.g.
(a) and (b) in (1):

(1)

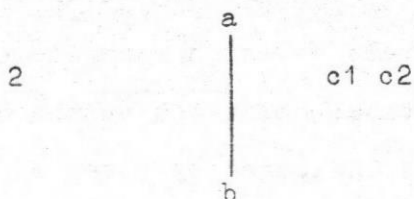$$GR_x \qquad \begin{array}{c} a \\ | \\ | \\ | \\ b \end{array}$$
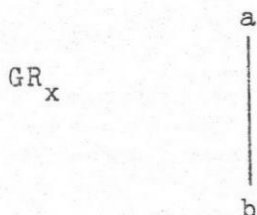
The linguistic element a bears the GRX
relation to b in(1): for example, if GRX is direct
object in(1), then b should bear the 2-relation to
a and so on.

As can be observed in(1) the linguistic levels
are not shown.(1) needs arcs to identify the
levels at which an element bears a relation to
another element. This is seen in(2):

(2)

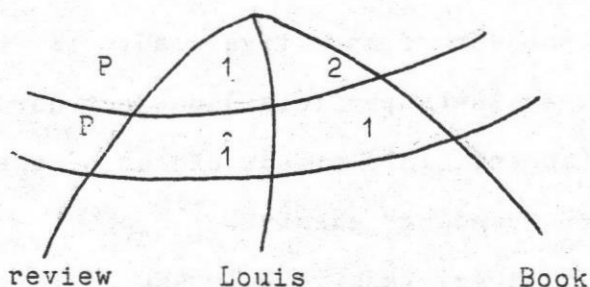$$2 \qquad \begin{array}{c} a \\ | \\ | \\ | \\ b \end{array} \qquad c1 \ c2$$

(2) shows that b bears the 2-relation to a at the

first and second level.

Moreover, RG claims that a nominal may change
its grammatical relation at the surface level.
Thus in a clause like(3) which is represented
in(4).

(3) That book was reviwed by Louis.

(4)

review   Louis   Book

the nominal <u>book</u> has a distinct GR in each level:
it is an object(2) in the first level: a subject
(1) in the second one.

2- **Personal passive:**

In this section I will present the RG
treatment of personal passives(section 2.1). Then
I will discuss personal passives in SA (section 2.2)
showing that such constructions conform to the
predictions of RG .

2.1. Personal passive in RG :

RG claims that passivization is universally characterized as follows(Perlmutter and Postal 1983:9):

    (5) A direct object of an active clause is the (superficial) subject of "corresponding" passive.

    (6) The subject of an active clause is neither the(superficial) subject nor the(superficial) direct object of the "corresponding" passive.

(5)-(6) show that any passive rule should refer to the grammatical relations of the nominals involved. Any attempt to characterize such phenomena in terms of the linear order of elements would not have language independent application. To illustrate (5)-(6),lets examine a clause such as(8a) which is the passive counterpart of (7).

    (7) Noaml gave that book to me.

    (8)

        a. That book was given to me by Noami

b.


```
                    3
     P        1  2
                    3
      P      1̂  1

give      Nómi        book      me
```
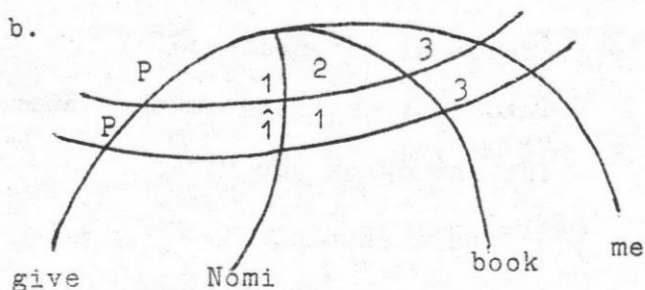
As(8b) (which is the stratal diagram of(8a) shows,
the nominal that book bears the 2-relation in the
initial stratum in accordance with (6). In contrast,
the nominal Noami which bears the initial
1-relation(i.e. the subject of the active clause)
is placed en chomage in the final stratum. This
fact is in line with the chomeur condition, which
is informally stated(Perlmutter and Postal 1983:20)
as in:

(9) The Chomeur Condition: A nominal
bears the chomeur relation if and only
if its GR is taken over by another
nominal.

2.2.: SAs Personal Passive:

In SA passive constructions the nominal that
bears the final stratum 2 relation(the direct
direct object) advances to I(subject), as in the

(b) clauses:

    (10)a.S̆araba al-qit-u al-maa?-a

       drink-pst the-cat-nom the-water-acc

       The cat drank the water.

      b.S̆uriba al-maa?-u

       drink-pass-past the-water-nom

       The water was drunk.

    (11)a.darabat al-bint-u al-walad-a

       hit-pst-f the-gril-nom the-boy-acc

       The girl hit the boy.

      b. duriba al-walad-u

       hit-pass-pst the-boy-nom

       'The boy was hit".

The nominals that bear the final 2-relation in
(10a) and(11a) advance to I in the (b)clauses:the
nominal al-walad-a, which is a final 2 in (11a),
is a final 1-arc in(11b). This is evidenced by
two facts(Abbas 1982):(a) These nominals are in
the nominative in the (b) clauses;:they are in the
accusative in the (a) clauses.(b) these nominals
occupy the post-verbal position which is normally

reserved for subjects in SA.

In contrast, nominals that head other than final 2-arcs can not undergo passive: they can not advance to subject in passive constructions. Thus clauses like(12b-c) are ungrammatical since a nominal that is not a final 2 is allowed to advance to 1 (subject).[5]

> (12)a.qaddama ar-ra?i:s-u risa:lat-an
>
> give-pst the-president-nom letter-acc
>
> li-l-mudaris-i fi-l-madrasst-i
>
> to-the-teacher-obl in-the-school
>
> "The president gave a letter to
>
> the teacher in the school";
>
> b.*quddima al-mudaris-u risa:lat-an
>
> give-pass-pst the-teacher-nom letter-cc
>
> "The president gave a letter to the
>
> teacher in the school."
>
> c.*quiddima-t al-mardrassat-u risa:lat-an
>
> give-pass-pst-f.the-school-nom-letter-acc
>
> -i-l-mudaris-i fi

to-the-teacher-obl in

"The school was given a letter in to
the teacher."

Clauses like(12b-c) are ungrammatical: in each
case a nominal that is not a final 2 is made to
advance to 1 (subject): in(12b) the advancee is
a final[3](indirect object):in(12c) the nominal
that advances to 1 is an oblique(a directional
nominal).

Thus the passive rule in SA can be given as
follows:

(13) The passive rule:
Only final 2s can advance to 1 in
passive constructions.

In this section we have discussed personal
passives in SA. The next section deals with SA
impersonal passives.

3 • Impersonal passive

In this section I discuss the nature of
impersonal passives as treated in RG(section 3.1)
In section(3.2) I show that SA impersonal passives

are based on a special class of intransitive verbs.

3.1. Impersonal passive in RG:

Impersonal passives(Perlmutter 1978:1983)
are associated with a special class of intransitives.
This fact is accounted for by the Unaccusative
Hypothesis(UH) which claims that there are two
classes of intransitive clauses: initially unergative
clauses and initially unaccusative clauses[6]. The
former type contains a 1 but no 2: the latter
contains a 2 but no 1.Thus(14) is an ergative clause
whereas(15) is an unaccusative clause:

    (14) The man ran.

    (15) The snow melted;

The structures of(14)-(15) can be represented by
the stratal diagrams(16)-(17),respectively:

(16) P 1 / ran / man

(17) P 2 / P 1 / melt / snow
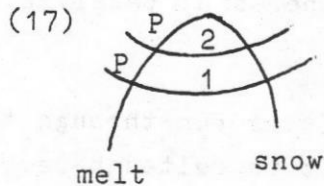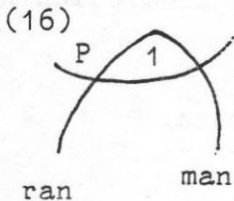
In RG it is claimed (Perlmutter 1978:163)
that whether a clause is initially unergative or

initially unaccusative is predictable from the
semantics of the clause. The class of initially
unergative clauses contain predicates that describe
willed or volitional acts such as <u>work</u>,<u>play</u>,<u>speak</u>,
<u>walk</u>, <u>talk</u> etc. The class of initially unaccusative
clauses are characterized by predicates that denote
involuntary acts,the subject being a patient to
whom things are happening. Such predicates include
<u>smell</u>, <u>sleep</u>, <u>melt</u>,<u>fall</u>,<u>sink</u>, <u>dry</u>,<u>drown</u> etc.

This classification is justified by syntactic
facts. The prediction made here(cf.Perlmutter
1978) is: only the initially unergative intransitive
clauses would be compatible with impersonal passives;
the initially unaccusative clauses can not be the
basis for impersonal passives. This prediction holds
in English:

(18) It is run through this road.
(19) * It is melted here.

(18)-(19) clearly show that only initially unergative
intransitive clauses can be the basis for impersonal
passives. This fact has also been attested in
several languages(e.g.Dutch(Perlmutter 1978).

The fact that the two types of intransitive
clauses behave differently with respect to imper-
sonal passives directly follows from such an RG
law as the I advancement exclusiveneas law(IAEX)
which claims that" a given clause can have at most
one advancement to 1"(Perimutter 1980:211). It is
claimed(Perimutter 1978) that impersonal passives
involve the insertion of a dummy as 2 which
advances to 1 placing the initial 1 en chomage.
This is the case when an impersonal passive is
based on an unergative intransitive clause. Thus
a clause like(18)would have the stratal diagram(20).

(20)


```
      P  1
    P    1    2
   P     1̂    1

  run    boy   D
```
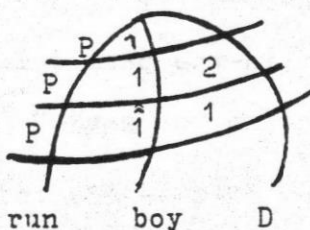
Initially unaccusative intransitive clauses
have been shown to involve 2 to 1 advancement.[7]If
an impersonal passive is based on them, another
advancement to 1̇ would occur. That is, the
advancement of the dummy.This would definitely

lead to the violation of the 1 AEX. A clause like
(19)would then be represented as in(21).:

(21)*

melt   snow D
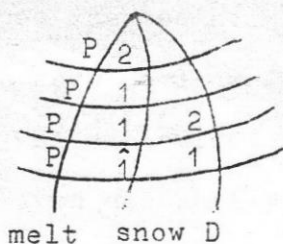
3.2.: Impersonal passives in SA:

Impresonal passives in SA are exemplified
by(22)-(23):

(22)   rugisa fi-l-hafl-i

dance-pass-pst in-the-party-obl

"It was danced in the party."

(23)   luʕiba fi-l-hadi:qat-i

play-pass-pst in-the park-obl

"It was played in the park."

A preliminary examination of(22)-(23) indicates
that these impersonal passives are based on
initially unergative intransitive clauses: the
predicates these clauses contain describe willed
or volitional acts. This might lead us to believe
that SA also obeys the unaccusative hypothesis as

posited by Perlmutter(1978)(see section 3.1). In
order to test this hypothesis (i.e.only initially
unergative intransitive clauses are compatible
with impersonal passives), lets examine the
possibility of classifying SA intransitive
predicates into two semantic classes:

Intransitive verbs denoting voluntary acts
include:

(24)

ragasa	"dance"
laʕaba	"play"
basaqa	"split"
zahafa	"crawl"
baka	"weep"
sarraxa	"cry"

Intransitive verbs describing involuntary
acts are given in(25):

(25)

waqaʕa	"fall"
halama	"dream"
šamma	"smell"
saʕala	"cough"

RG predicts that the predicates in(24) are compa-
tible with impersonal passives whereas those in
(25) are not:

(26)   busiqa ʕala al-ʔard-i

      spit-pass-pst on the-floor-obl

      "It was spit on the floor".

(27)   zuhifa ʕala al-ʔard-i

      crawl-pass-pst on the-ground-obl

      " It was crawled on the ground".

(28)[*] wuqi ʕʕala-ʔard-i

      fall-pass-pst on the-ground-obl

      "It was fallen on the ground".

(29)[*] Šumma fi-l-ṭari:q-i

      smell-pass-pst in-the-road-obl

      "It was smelt in the road."

Clauses like(28)-(29) show the incompatibility of
initially unaccusative intransitive clauses with
impersonal passives.

    SA impersonal passives involve a dummy that
is inserted as a 2 which advances to 1.[8] This
analysis of impersonal passives in SA shows why

clauses like(28)-(29) already have an advancement
to 1 any further advancement to I would render
the clauses ungrammatical.

Thus SA has two types of intransitives that
are classified on the basis of their semantic
properties. These two classes have been shown to
differ as to their syntactic function:only
initially unergative intransitive clauses can get
into construction with impersonal passives. Is
this analysis justifiable or is there another
proposal that would account for these facts? The
following section will discuss this possibility.

3.2.1. The Spontaneous Demotion

In this section I will propose an alternative
analysis--the Spontaneous Demotion-- for SA
impersonal passives. I will then argue against
this analysis showing the superiority of the
Advancement Hypothesis in dealing with impersonal
passives.

Recall that in the previous section the SA
impersonal passive is characterized as involving

the insertion of a dummy as a 2 which advances to
to 1,placing the initial 1 en chomage(Perimutter
and Postal 1984:106). In contrast to this analysis,
Comrie(1977) posits the Spontaneous Demotion(SD)
which claims that clauses like(26) do not involve
any dummy insertion; the nominal bearing the final
1-relation is spontaneously demoted to chomeur.
Thus a clause like(26)would have the stratal
diagram(30) rather than (31):

(30)
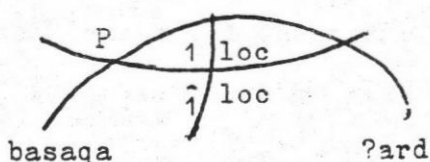
(31)
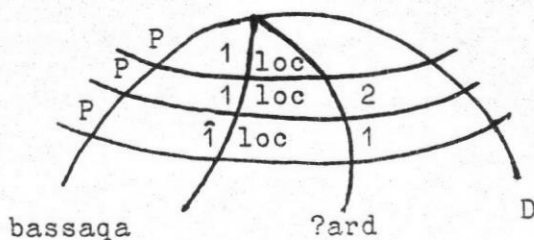
Not that(30) violates the chomeur condition
since ther is no nominal that has taken over the

GR of the chomeurized nominal. Does this analysis
constitute a threat to RG?

This analysis (the SD analysis) lacks the
descriptive capacity in dealing with SA impersonal
passives :For Comrie,clauses like(26) and (28)
have the same initial GR,Namely 1. Therefore,
there is no way for Comrie to explain why(28) is
ungrammatical whereas(26)is grammatical and there
is no justification for the distincet syntactic
behavior of the predicates in(24)-(25).

Under the advancement Hypothesis, the
ungrammaticality of impersonal passives of initially
unaccusative clauses(28)-(29) is a consequence of
universal principles of grammar"(Perlmutter
1978:175).

4. Conclusion:

To recapitulate, this study has shown that
there are two types of passives in SA: personal
passives and impersonal passives[9].Personal
passives are characterized as involving the
advancement of a 2 to 1. Impersonal passives

have been shown to be based on initiaily unerga-
tive intransitive clauses: they involve a dummy
as 2 which advances to 1 placing the initial 1 en
chomage. The insertion of a dummy as 2 in the
SA impersonal passives has enabled us to account
for the ungrammaticality of the impersonal passives
that are based on initially unaccusative intransi-
tive clauses. The SD analysis would not be able to
account for such clauses without positing ad hoc
statements and devices that would complicate SA
grammar.

NOTES

1-   RG rules such as the chomeur law and the
      1-Advancement Exlusiveness law are discussed
      in the appropriate sections.

2-   See Perimutter(1980) for more detailed
      discussion.

3-   All other nominals show the relation between
      the predicate and nominals in a clause (see
      Perimutter 1980).

4-   Note that(3) can also be represented as in (1):

$$P$$
$$P \quad c_1 \; 1 \; c_1 \quad 2 \quad c_1$$
$$c_2 \quad cho \; c_2 \qquad 1 \; c_2$$

review   Lovis   book
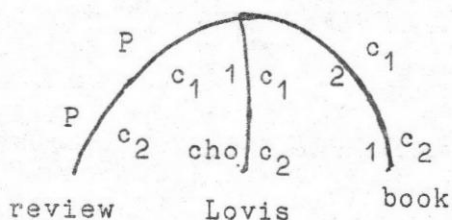
5-   Olmstead and Gamaal El-Deen(1982:90) claim
that in Colloquial Arabic an indirect object
can be subject in a passive.

6-   For a detailed discussion of the Unaccusative
Hypothesis, see Perimutter(1978).

7-   The Unaccusative Advancement entails that
every intransitive stratum is called"unaccu-
sative stratum" which contains an initial 2
must advance to 1(according to the final 1
law(Perimutter 1978).

8-   Note that the dummy is not visible in languages
such as English or Arabic but there are several
languages(e.g.German and Dutch(Perimutter 1978)
in which the dummy appears on the surface.

9-   Olmstead and Gamaal El-Deen(1982) claim that
colloquial Arabic does not have impersonal
passives.

REFERENCES

Abbas.H.1982. <u>Al-Nahw Al-waafe</u>. Cairo:Daar al-
        maarif.

Chomsky.N.1962. " A Transformation Approach to
        Syntax".in A.Hill(ed.1.The Third Texas
        conference on Problems of linguistic
        Analysis in Austin, University of Texas.

Comrie,B.1977."In Defence of Spontaneous
        Demottion: The Impersonal Passive".In P.
        Cole and J.Sadock(eds.)<u>Syntax and</u>
        <u>Semantics 8:Grammatical Relations</u>.
        New York: the Academic press.

Dixon.R.1972: <u>The Dyirbal Language of North</u>
        <u>Queenslan</u>. Cambridge: Cambridge
        University press.

Filmore.C.1968:" The Case for Case." In Bach and
        Harms(eds).<u>Universals in Linguistic</u>
        <u>Theory</u>. New York : Holt.Rinchart and
        Winston.

Gerdts.D.1984."A Relational Grammar of Halkomelem
        Cqusals".In C.Cook and D.Gerdts(eds.)
        Syntax and Semantics 16. New York: the
        Academic press.

Olmstead.G. and S.Gamaal El-Deen.1982:Cairene
        Colloquial Arabic.Amsterdam: North-Holland.

Perlmutter.D.,1978."Impersonal Passives and the
        Unaccusative Hypothesis". In Preceedings
        of the 4th Annual Meeting of the Berkely
        Linguistics society. Berkely: University
        of Berkely.

Perlmutter.D.1980:" Relational Grammar".In
        Moravcisk and Wirth(eds.). Syntax and
        Semantica 13:Current Approach to Syntax.
        New York: the Academic press.

Perlmutter,D.and P.Postal.1974. Unpublished
        lectures presented at the University of
        Massachutes, Amherst.

Perlmutter .D.and P.Postal.1983a."Some Proposed
        Laws of Basic clause Structure".,in
        Perimutter(ed.).

Perlmutter.D. and P.Postal.1983b. " The Relational
        Succession Law",in Perlmutter(ed.).

Perlmutter.D. and P.Postal.1983c." Toward a
        Universal Characterization of Passivi-
        zation". in Perlmutter(ed.).

Perlmutter.D. and P.Postal.1984." The Advancement
        Exclusiveness Law".In Perlmutter and
        Rosen (eds.).