

The Pragmatics of Explicit Passive Sentences
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The Issue: There has been relatively little done in the field of semantics on passive sentences, but the popular view of them seems to be that passive voice hides or buries the agent seen in an active sentence (Pullum 2014). AnderBois (2010) makes a tripartite division between active sentences (1a), passive sentences with an overt agent (1b), and passive sentences without an overt agent (1c).

1. a. Someone broke the vase
b. The vase was broken by someone
c. The vase was broken

AnderBois argues that while (1a-c) are mutually entailing and truth-conditionally equivalent, (1a-b) raise different *issues* in the inquisitive semantics sense than (1c) does, namely that in overtly mentioning an agent, (1a-b) raise the issue of an agent, and so are semantically different from (1c) in which this issue is not raised. Under this view, there is no semantic difference between (1a) and (1b).

Research Objective: Are active sentences and passive sentences with an overt agent (in English, contained within a *by*-phrase) equivalent? If not, what are the differences between them? I aim to remedy the gap in the literature by exploring the pragmatics of passive sentences, and especially passive sentences with an overt agent.

Results: In the framework I am using, questions introduce explicit questions-under-discussion (QUDs), such as *What did Sam eat?* (Roberts 1996). Old information in a discourse is information which is given by the QUD (e.g. *Sam, eat*), and new information is information which is not explicitly given by the QUD (*what Sam ate*). I found that passives with overt agents behaved like sentences with focus on the agent, but not, as predicted by AnderBois, like active sentences. In (2-3), I show how active, focused agent, and passive sentences behave the same when the agent is new information (i.e. is not provided by the question under discussion, as when it is the variable position in the q-alternative set), but that when the agent is old information (provided by the QUD), the active sentence with the agent is felicitous but the sentences with focus on the agent or with the agent passivized is felicitous.

2. QUD: Who broke the vase? (old information – broke, vase; new information – John)
 - a. John broke the vase
 - b. [John]_F broke the vase
 - c. The vase was broken by John
3. QUD: What did John break? (old information – John, break; new information – the vase)
 - a. John broke the vase
 - b. #[John]_F broke the vase
 - c. #The vase was broken by John

I argue that passivization acts similarly to focus in terms of pragmatics, and that active sentences and passive sentences with an overt agent may be semantically distinct à la AnderBois, but they are pragmatically distinct. Passive sentences with an overt agent require the agent to be new information in the discourse, like active sentences with focused agents but unlike active sentences without focus on the agent.