愛媛大学教育学部紀要　人文・社会科学　第31巻　第２号　67～101　1999

The Passive in English and Japanese: A Contrastive Study

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1. Introduction

Contrastive studies come in many different forms and are written for a variety of purposes, but generally contain two components: *linguistic* and *pedagogical*. In other words, they are concerned with the formal properties of language on the one hand, and with L2 learning on the other (James, 1980). The psycholinguistic basis for contrastive studies is *Transfer Theory*, or the assumption that language learners will transfer to their L2 the formal features of their L1 (Odlin, 1989). The underlying theoretical assumptions derive from the linguistic relativity hypothesis, or the premise that culture, through language, influences the way we think and our classification of the experienced world (Whorf, 1956).

Early contrastive analyses were taxonomic in nature and were conceived within structural linguistic frameworks. They often included didactic claims related to the selection and grading of target items, as well as their presentation in the classroom. In the 1960s, however, linguistic relativity was replaced by the universal base hypothesis (i.e., all languages are alike at an abstract underlying level), and a search began for universal (i.e., non-language specific) sets of basic grammatical primes. As a consequence, contrastive studies, along with taxonomic descriptive linguistics in general, went into decline: "linguistically, the basis of contrastive description seemed to be unable to withstand the stresses of constantly changing models of analysis and theoretical approaches," while psycholinguistically and pedagogically, contrastive studies were successful in predicting only part of learners' problems and were

unable to account for developmental errors or idiosyncracies of language unrelated to either L1 or L2 (Candlin, cited in James, 1980, p. v).

Although studies in contrastive linguistics remain problematic and often "fraught with controversy" (James, 1980, p. 166), in recent times there has been a marked revival of interest in the field, which can be attributed to two main factors: (1) a reappraisal of the constellation of notions associated with linguistic relativity, leading to the formulation of an intermediate position between relativity and universalism (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996): "There are no acquired human skills that are not simultaneously supported by universal cognitive predispositions and transformed by specific cultural traditions" (Levinson, 1996, p. 141); and (2) the extension of contrastive analyses beyond the sentence as a unit to functional and discoursal domains such as Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis. This broadening of the scope of contrastive linguistics has taken place along two dimensions: *functionally*, in the way that people use language within situational and sociocultural contexts; and *formally*, in the analysis of larger, suprasentential units, or texts (James, 1980, p. 102). This investigation is in accord with these recent developments in contrastive studies in viewing passivization in functional terms, in stressing the importance of form–function relations in syntax, and in emphasizing semantic and pragmatic factors in passive use. Nevertheless, as Givón (1981, p. 166) points out, structural evidence is often a good heuristic, and basic taxonomic descriptions of the passive are also provided as a useful starting point for understanding the form.

Contrastive studies fall within the field of Applied Linguistics, described by Enkvist (1987, p. 23) as "an eclectic discipline, perhaps best likened to a corridor for two-way traffic between linguistics and those of its sister disciplines that also study language together with their various applications." This definition motivates and informs the present work, which attempts to create a conduit between linguistic theory and L2 teaching practice from the standpoint of a specific linguistic category, that of the passive, in two very different languages. On the one hand, this involves "stepping down on" higher-level linguistic knowledge to make it accessible for L2 pedagogy; on the other hand, it requires that pedagogical approaches themselves be construed within established frameworks of linguistic theory. The primary goals of this study are thus to provide a pedagogically-relevant and theoretically-valid overview of the passive construction in English and Japanese which will be of practical value to L2 learners, teachers, and syllabus designers, as well as to clearly delineate the most important theoretical advances in research in the field, without limiting the analysis to any one particular model. The research findings presented here are at several different levels of analysis, including English and Japanese L2 pedagogy, syntax-based, generative grammar, functional approaches (including syntheses of function and syntax), and (in the case of the Japanese passive) prototype analyses.[1] The authors of this study are also

[1] The theoretical domains of transitivity and voice will not be addressed here as they are felt to be beyond the scope of this investigation.

in agreement with the following views expressed by Kuno regarding the nature of theory-oriented research in linguistics in general (1978, p. 274):

> [M]ost of the sophisticated...analyses that we linguists come up with do not make any sense to most other grammarians, to say nothing of their intelligibility to teachers and students.... On the other hand, a solid and comprehensive analysis of a hither-to poorly understood grammatical feature..., presented in easily understandable terms more or less independent of any [one] theoretical framework...will have a lasting value.... It will be intelligible to grammarians of different theoretical training, to teachers..., and hopefully...to students.

The methodology used for executing contrastive analyses generally involves two steps, that of *description* and *comparison* (James, 1980, p. 63). In this study, the passive constructions in English and Japanese are first described within two distinct but roughly parallel frameworks, each with differing emphases. In spite of controversies regarding terminology and classification, the English passive is relatively well established in the literature, and there is a general consensus as to the basic features of the form. However, although students usually have little difficulty learning the structure of the passive, they often have problems understanding when to use it. Therefore, after a brief introduction to passive formation and classification, the focus of investigation in terms of the English passive is primarily on its functions and frequency of use, as well as the implications of these findings for L2 teaching purposes. The Japanese passive construction, on the other hand, is a good deal more complicated, and as yet there is no real consensus with regard to its classification and functions. As a result, the focus of this section has to do with the evolution of passive research in Japanese from the perspective of different linguistic schools of thought—in particular, their attempts to clarify long-standing controversies as to how the form should be classified, as well as their endeavors to reconcile the passive with other passive-related constructions in the language. The frequency of passive use in Japanese is not a consideration in this investigation as relevant empirical studies are virtually non-existent. The history of the Japanese passive, from its origins in ancient literary texts to the emergence of a modified form of the verb in modern times, is of considerable importance, however, in understanding how the construction is used in Japanese today, and is discussed in detail. In the final section of this study, a limited number of comparisons are drawn between the two languages in terms of passive form-function relationships, and certain cross-linguistic pedagogical considerations are highlighted.

2. The English Passive

2.0 Passive Formation

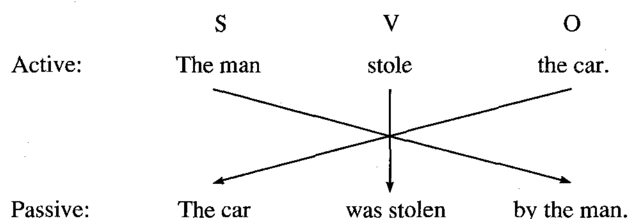
There are a number of variations to the English passive, but the basic construction is said to consist of the auxiliary verb *be* plus a past participle, called the *be*-passive in most grammars. Passive formation in English is generally presented as a transformation from the

active, with the direct object of a transitive verb in the active voice becoming the subject of the corresponding passive.[2] Thus, if a sentence such as "The man stole the car" is transposed to the passive, the resulting statement becomes "The car was stolen by the man."

In English L2 pedagogy, the transformation from active to passive is normally taught as a three-step process:

(1) the direct object of the active is promoted to the subject position in the passive
(2) the subject of the active is demoted to the agent in the passive and is preceded by the preposition *by*
(3) the active verb is transformed to its passive (*be* + V-en) counterpart

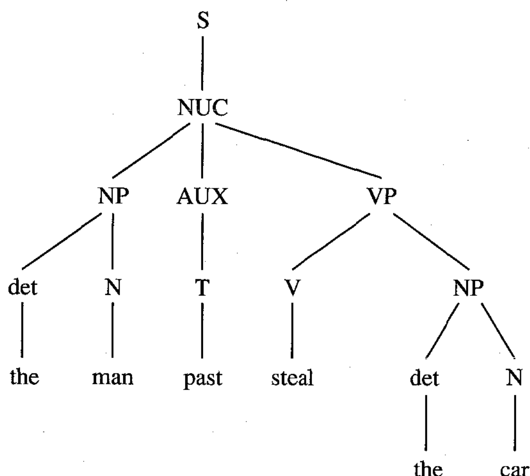
This process is often illustrated graphically for teaching purposes, as below:



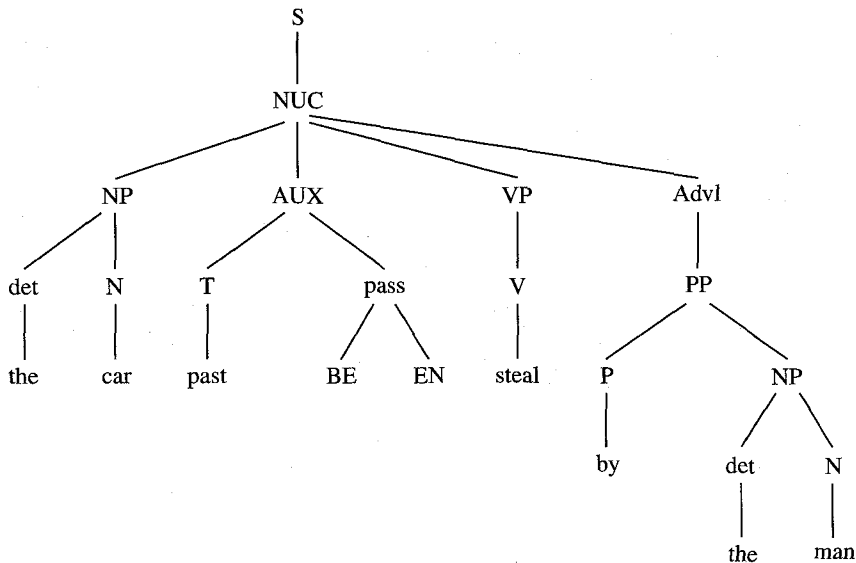
Passive formation can also be explained in terms of theory-oriented, linguistic frameworks. Syntax-based, generative approaches, for example, often depict the transformation from active to passive with the following simple formula (Palmer, 1987, p. 78):

$$NP_1 + V_{act} + NP_2 \rightarrow NP_2 + V_{pass} + by + NP_1$$

The structure of such a statement can be diagrammed as follows:



[2] Of note here is the fact that the Japanese passive can be formed from both transitive and intransitive verbs (see section 3.1).



2.1 Types of English Passive

Although the *be*–passive (*be* + V–en) is presented as representative of the passive construction in virtually all L2 teaching grammars and syllabuses, passivity can also be expressed through a variety of alternative forms in English. There is, however, considerable disagreement as to the classification of these passive variations, and even the terminology used varies greatly, depending on the author cited. No resolution to these problems seems possible at the present time as there is little consensus as to the scope of passive diversity in English. The four passive types presented here, *be*–, *get*–, activo–, and pseudo–passives,[3] reflect one approach to the issue of passive classification.

2.1.1 *Be*–Passive

As described above, the *be*–passive is found in all English L2 teaching materials as the basic form of the verb, and is most often presented as a transformation of the active voice. Yet a number of important caveats and restrictions need to be considered. For example, there are active verbs which do not have passive equivalents, as well as passives with no active counterparts. In some instances, the past participle also functions adjectivally, and although the construction resembles the *be*–passive, it does not convey true passive meaning. In addition, there are numerous alternatives to the auxiliary verb *be*, most of which are classified as *be*–passive variations.

A number of active verbs do not have passive counterparts since they are not actually

[3] Many other terms are used to describe passive variations, including semi–passive, statal passive, lexical passive, etc. (see Palmer, 1987, pp. 85–93).

transitive. These verbs include *have, weigh, cost,* and so forth, and are sometimes termed "middle verbs" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, pp. 224–225; Declerck, 1991, p. 201). For example:

Active	*Passive*
John has a book	*A book is had by John.
Tim weighs 200 pounds.	*200 pounds is weighed by Tim.

On the other hand, some passive verbs do not have active equivalents. For instance (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, op. cit.):

Active	*Passive*
*Somebody bore Mike in the US.	Mike *was born* in the US.
*Someone rumors that he will get the job.	It *is rumored* that he will get the job.

The past participle of the *be*-passive can also convey adjectival rather than verbal meaning, and this construction is known as the "stative" or "statal" passive (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 229; Palmer, 1987, p. 88):

The wells *are located* near the edge of the reserve.
(cf. The wells *were located* by two engineers.)

They *were married* for many years.
(cf. They *were married* at the church.)

The passives above express no agent and have no active counterpart; in addition, they function semantically as predicate adjectives rather than verbs. Some writers consider stative (or statal) passives a variation of the *be*-passive, while others argue that they should be categorized separately. Still others view them as related to pseudo-passives (see 2.1.4 below). Functional grammarians characterize stative passives as members of a distinct functional domain, that of *de-transitivization* (see 2.2.3 below).

A number of minor alternative forms of the auxiliary verb *be* can also be found in English. The *have*-auxiliary is sometimes used in complex passives in a construction which strongly resembles the causative; e.g., Hal had his car stolen last weekend (ibid., p. 86). In some instances, the *be* auxiliary can be replaced with *become,* and this form of the verb is known as a passive of transition (Frank, 1993), representing the results of some kind of development. The verb in the following sentence shares many of the characteristics of the perfect; e.g., This newspaper has already become widely read in this community. *Seem* is another commonly cited variation of the *be* auxiliary (Palmer, 1987, p. 87); e.g., He seems embarrassed by her actions (cf. He is embarrassed by her actions). In addition, a number of other verbs, such as *stand, lie,* and *remain,* can replace *be* in certain instances; e.g., The story remained untold (cf. The story was untold).

2.1.2 *Get*–Passive

The *get*–passive is generally portrayed as a colloquial alternative to the *be*–passive and is commonly found in informal writing and spoken English:

John *was* hurt in the accident
John *got* hurt in the accident. (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 226)

In this example, "the *be*–passive is formal or neutral whereas the *get*–passive is colloquial and perhaps also suggests the emotional involvement of the speaker...[or] some involvement on the part of the grammatical (i.e., surface) subject in bringing about the result" (ibid.).

Some authors state that the *get*–passive is more limited than the *be*–passive in that "it can only be used with verbs denoting actions and processes, not states" (ibid.). Consider, for example, the semantic features of the two verbs in the following sentence:

The door *was shut* at 6 o'clock, but I don't know when it *was shut*. (Curme, 1947, p. 53)
(state) (action)

The grammatical structure of both these passive forms is the same (i.e., *be* + past participle), but the nuance is different in each—the former indicates a state in which the door was kept closed, while the latter focuses on the action of shutting the door. In order to avoid this confusion, the *get* auxiliary can replace *be* in these latter situations conveying a sense of action or process:

The door *was shut* at six o'clock, but I don't know when it *got shut*.
(state) (action)

In contrast, other authors claim that *get*–passive "carries with it the meaning of 'arrive at a resultant state' and very often get + *–en* forms can be treated in terms of a statal passive": e.g., The picture got broken (Palmer, 1987, p. 89). However, if an agent is added to these verbs, an active sense results: e.g., The picture got broken by the children (ibid., p. 90). This problem of apparently contradictory expressive effects associated with the *get*–passive appears insoluble at the present time at this level of analysis.

Finally, from a structural standpoint, the auxiliary verb *get* does not function as a true auxiliary in passive negations and questions (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 227). As a result, *do* must function as the auxiliary verb in these instances:

- the *be*–passive:

John *was* shot by the policeman.	(passive)
John *was* not shot by the policeman.	(passive-negation)
Was John shot by the policeman?	(passive-question)

- the *get*–passive:

John *got* shot.	(passive)
John *didn't get* shot.	(passive-negation)
Did John *get* shot?	(passive question)

2.1.3 Activo–Passive

There is yet another type of passive, sometimes called the activo-passive,[4] in which the verb is in the active voice but the meaning conveyed is passive, most commonly describing a characteristic of the subject. For example:

This novel *sells* like hot cakes.
The telegram *reads* as follows. (Mizutani, 1985, p. 121)

Although these sentences contain active verbs, they are interpreted as having passive meaning because they express characteristics of the subjects—i.e, a *marketable* novel or a *readable* telegram.

2.1.4 Pseudo–Passive

The pseudo-passive is also included in most English passive taxonomies, but the term "pseudo-passive" itself is defined in a variety ways in the literature, and in general this construction remains poorly understood.[5] Some authors consider the pseudo-passive to be related to the stative passive (Palmer, 1987, pp. 85–87), but in the present work this term is used to refer to the "prepositional passive," so called because the addition of a preposition is necessary for the passive verb to function grammatically (Takami, 1995, p. 40). The following examples are self-explanatory:

This question will be dealt *with* later in the book.	This lake should not be fished *in*.
(cf. *This question will be dealt later in the book.)	(cf. *This lake should not be fished.)

2.2 Functions of the Passive in English

English L2 teaching materials attribute a wide variety of uses to the passive—Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1983), for example, suggest seven uses, while Thomson & Martinet (1960) outline eight. However, many of these proposed uses are actually overlapping variations on the same theme, and such approaches by enumeration not only tend to produce potentially endless lists of items, but they are incapable of providing the theoretical underpinnings necessary for analyzing and understanding the functions of passivization.

Purely structural, theory-oriented definitions of passive functioning, such as those within the generative tradition, also have "a number of severe limits," especially in accommodating cross-language linguistic evidence (Givón, 1981, p. 166). Thus, passivization has been viewed

[4] Declerck (1991, pp. 203–204) calls this type of passive form the "medio-passive," while Palmer (1987, p. 92) describes it as an "adverbial passive."

[5] See for example, Bolinger (1975), Chomsky (1981), Palmer (1987), and Takami (1995).

more recently in explicitly functional terms, with greater emphasis on semantic and pragmatic factors within cross-language typologies (functional or relational grammar), or within a modified framework of form-function relations in syntax (functional-syntax approaches). These post-generative, typological approaches to passivization analyze a variety of languages in terms of " 'functional domains' rather than simply...'functions' in syntax" (ibid., p. 164). They attempt to delimit functional domains by defining form-function correlations in syntax; i.e., between "functional points on the domain continuum and structural properties of the coding constructions" (ibid., pp. 166-167). Functional approaches to passivization generally characterize passive use in terms of the following three domains: topicalization, impersonalization, and de-transitivization (ibid., p. 168).

2.2.1 Topicalization

Topicalization is also termed *clausal topic assignment* by Givón who describes this function as follows: "The subject/agent of the active clause ceases to be the topic, and a non-agent argument of the active then assumes, by whatever means, the clausal-topic function" (ibid.). Topicalization brings a non-subject topic into focal position and produces a shift in *thematization* by foregrounding the receiver or results of an action, or outcomes and consequences in general, by placing these elements at the beginning of a sentence (Pennington, 1996, pp. 51−52). In the following example, passivization results in the direct object of the active, *his article*, being foregrounded and brought into a correspondingly more important position as the focus of the sentence:

His article *was accepted* by a prestigious international journal.
(cf. A prestigious international journal accepted his article.)

In a subject-prominent language such as English, this function is significant because it provides the means for topicalizing particularly important non-subject noun phrases, as in the following example (Watabe et al., 1991, p. 117):

Reagan's decision to build 100 B-1 bombers *is being viewed* by presidential watchers as a political move.
(cf. Presidential watchers are viewing Reagan's decision to build....)

2.2.2 Impersonalization

Impersonalization (or *agent identity suppression*), which is the basis for a number of important uses of the passive in English, is described by Givón (op. cit.) as follows: "The identity of the subject/agent of the active is suppressed, by whatever means."

The active subject can be suppressed through passivization, for example, when it is either unknown or unimportant. In these instances, the passive *by* phrase (i.e., the active subject) is normally omitted, resulting in a more impersonal tone, as below:

My purse *was stolen.*
(cf. Somebody stole my purse.)

The castle *was built* around the fifteenth century.
(cf. Somebody built the castle around the 15th century.)

This passive function is also important in creating an objective or neutral stance, as in certain kinds of academic discourse: "In reporting research or scientific experiments, writers often use the passive voice to preserve objectivity, to emphasize the work being done on a project rather than who is performing the work" (Hodges et al., 1994, p. 274):

Observations of these phenomena *were carried out* over a specified period of time.
(cf. I carried out observations of these phenomena....)

The results *have been determined* to be accurate within the following parameters.
(cf. We have determined that....)

In this use of the passive, particular human agents or actions are often deliberatively avoided in a cautious or conservative approach to presenting facts (Pennington, 1996, p. 53):

The Korean language *is thought to be* genetically *related* to both Japanese and Turkish...
(cf. We think the Korean language is...)

This system *was found to be unstable* under conditions of...
(cf. I found this system to be...) (ibid.)

In similar circumstances, arising from less honorable intentions, the passive can be used to avoid attributing responsibility or blame for some act (ibid.), and is thus a favorite construction in "bureaucratese" and the language of politicians:

The information *has been leaked* to the press.
(cf. A member of our staff has leaked the information to the press.)

The President's image *has been damaged.*
(cf. This affair has damaged the President's image.) (ibid.)

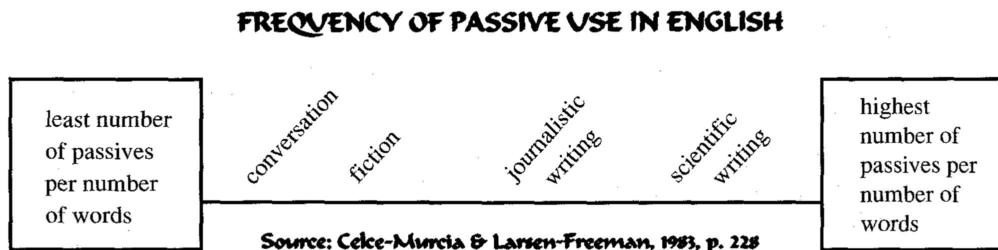
2.2.3 De-transitivization

The functional domain of de-transitivization can be described as follows: "The clause becomes semantically less-active, less-transitive, more-stative" (Givón, op. cit.). This function is related to the stative (or statal) passive sub-category, which is characterized by a lack of both agent and active counterpart, and by a past participle which acts more like a predicate adjective than a verb. For examples, see 2.1.1, above.[6]

2.3 Frequency of Passive Use in English

A number of studies have been carried out to determine the frequency of passive use

in English,[7] but a good deal more research will be required before any definitive conclusions can be reached. In general, however, English discourse types can be placed along a frequency continuum, as follows:



Not surprisingly, in light of the discussion of passive functions above, the passive is found most frequently in written English, especially in writing of a scientific nature such as research articles. In most other kinds of writing it is found considerably less frequently. In business letters, for example, where the preferred style is formal, yet friendly, the "formality does not include extensive use of the passive voice" (Connor, 1996, p. 138). Use of the English passive is quite rare in almost all forms of oral discourse. However, in both written and oral discourse, the vast majority of passive sentences, approximately 85% by some accounts, do not take an explicit agent (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, pp. 225 & 231).

The passive seems to have a special utility in scientific writing because it suggests detachment and objectivity, a neutral and impersonal stance, and emphasizes the work being done on a project rather than the individuals who perform the work (Hodges et al., 1994, p. 274). Yet even within scientific texts there are significant differences in passive usage. Studies show, for instance, that passives are found most frequently in the methods section of research articles, while they are not nearly so common in introductions. They are also employed extensively in abstracts, but in the results and discussion sections their usage is variable (Swales, 1990, pp. 134–137).

The methods section of the research article, which contains the highest frequency of passive use of any discourse type in English, is generally composed of four sub-sections, providing information on subjects, materials, procedures, and analyses (Brown, 1988, pp. 48–52). The methods section is important in explaining any physical, chemical, biological, or mechanical processes being used, and in laying out the specific procedural steps employed in the experiment. The writing used in this section is characterized by use of the simple

[6] An additional, commonly-noted use of the passive falls within structural rather than functional domains: The passive is used in making combinations of sentences "smoother," as "when the writer wishes to retain the same grammatical subject in successive clauses": e. g., George Foreman beat Joe Frazier, but he was beaten by Muhammad Ali (cf. George Foreman beat Joe Frazier, but Muhammad Ali....) (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 228).

[7] See for example, George (1963), Cooray (1965), Duskova & Urbanova (1967), Huddleston (1971), Wingard (1981), Tarone et al. (1981), and Swales (1990).

past tense, sequence language to mark the different steps of the procedure, and the use of passive verb forms to describe the activities themselves; e.g., First, x liters of water were poured into a distillation container; the chemicals were then added according to stated specifications, etc.

Of particular interest for understanding the broader context of passive use in English is the fact that "frequency counts within dimensions show that when a text has many passives, it also has many nominalizations, as in a scientific text. In contrast, when a text has few passives, as in a conversational text, it also has few nominalizations" (Connor, 1996, p. 158). Nominalization is a process by which verbs or adjectives are turned into nouns (e.g., react > reaction; equal > equality), and a sentence which is normally seen as dynamic, such as "She wrote the essay," is portrayed in a static sense, as in "The writing of the essay...." As a result of nominalization, "the complexity of academic writing resides far more in the noun group...than in the verb group..." (Pennington, 1996, p. 46). These noun groups tend to occur in combination with prepositions and adjectives, forming noun phrase clusters or "stacks" which can be extremely complex (ibid.). For example:

Increasing evidence of a global warming trend in the direction predicted by the model has been confirmed by the measured increases in the level of greenhouse gases.
\> (the measured increases) in [(the level) of (greenhouse gases)]... (ibid.)
NP NP NP

On the other hand, verbs in academic discourse, whether passive or active, "tend to be drawn from a relatively small set of reporting or relationship verbs (e.g., *be, appear, show, demonstrate, indicate, report*)..." (ibid.). Thus, "the verb group provides a simple frame within which complex ideas and relationships can be expressed by means of a noun group" (ibid., p. 53), and in this context, the passive in particular provides an impersonal orientation towards events, ideas, and their relationships. The most common difficulties in academic writing, however, are due to complex noun groups which can only be learned in relation to the specialized texts, concepts, and usage of a particular field (ibid., p. 54).

2.4 Pedagogical Implications

The most common approach to teaching the passive in English L2 pedagogy is by means of conversion exercises from the active. For example, Declerck (1991, p. 204) states that "the best way to teach students the various passive structures that exist in English is to start from active clause patterns and to show how the corresponding passive structures look like [*sic*]. Speaking of a 'passive transformation' is therefore useful for didactic purposes." However, this approach has also been criticized for giving rise to misconceptions among learners that "the passive construction is a mere transposition of the active voice" and that the two forms are "under all circumstances interchangeable" (Cooray, 1965, p. 203). As Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1983, p. 221) point out, the "problem for non-English

speakers [is] mainly with regard to usage." Students can easily learn the form of the passive but "they have problems learning when to use it" (ibid.). Grammatical structures should be learned "in relation to the specific purposes and communicative acts which the speaker or writer needs to perform" (Pennington, 1996, p. 54), and in the case of the English passive it is clear that the construction should be taught within the context of written academic discourse and in relation to other grammatical processes such as nominalization.

One variation of the passive which does find its way into colloquial speech is the *get*-passive, but it is "hardly ever mentioned or taught in ESL/EFL texts" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983, p. 227). This use of the passive may require special instructional techniques and teachers should present it to students as appropriate (ibid.).

A further pedagogical issue has to do with the fact that an "overwhelming number of passive sentences that occur in connected oral or written discourse do not even express an agent" (ibid., pp. 230-231). As a result, the agentless passive should be emphasized much more than it is now. Shintani (cited in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, ibid., p. 225), for example, suggests that "we teach our ESL/EFL students when and why to retain the agent in those approximately 15 percent of passive sentences that have explicit agents—rather than trying to give them rules for omitting the agent in those 85 percent of passives that are agentless."

Finally, many handbooks on style typically recommend avoiding use of the passive. Hodges et al. (1994, p. 79), for example, provide readers with the following suggestions for effective writing: "Most writers choose the active voice because it is clearer, more precise, more concise, and more vigorous than the passive voice. Use [the] passive voice only when you have good reason." This advice, though well-intentioned, may be overstated. Success in many forms of academic writing today is dependent to a large degree on the skillful exploitation of the passive construction. As students' writing capabilities progress, they should be given effective and appropriate instruction in the use of the passive (see for example, Kane, 1988, p. 205; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, pp. 44-45).

3. The Japanese Passive

3.0 Background

The Japanese passive has not been documented as extensively as the passive in English, but recently it has been the subject of intensive investigation. It is clear that the Japanese passive is still far from being clearly defined, and there are numerous approaches to explaining this form found in the literature, from the most basic to the very technically advanced. In an overview of these approaches, however, it will become clear that definitive answers have yet to be found, and our goal is thus to clarify the position of the Japanese passive as it stands in the literature today.

First of all, we will examine the standard approach to the passive and its problematic issues. In Japanese, passive verbs are formed with the addition of *(ra)reru* to the verb root

(e.g., *mi-ru*, "look at," becomes *mi-rareru*, "be looked at"). Two types of passive, called direct and indirect passives,[8] are generally presented in most Japanese L2 teaching materials, although there are a number of variations to this standard approach (see Kaigai Gijutsusya Kensyu Kyokai, 1984; Mizutani, 1985; Hiroo Japanese Center, 1989; and Jorden, 1990). Direct passives (e.g., Taro-wa Hanako-ni tatak-are-ta, "Taro was hit by Hanako"), which take only transitive verbs, are parallel to the English passive and express "pure" passive meanings (Kuno, 1973, p. 302). Meantime, indirect passives (e.g., Taro-ga ame-ni fu-rare-ta; literally, *"Taro was fallen by rain"; corresponding to the English, "Unfortunately, Taro was caught in the rain") can be derived from intransitive verbs and express "adversity" meanings, an important characteristic of the Japanese passive.

However, as examples become more detailed, the above basic approach appears to be insufficient and leaves numerous questions unanswered. There are three sets of problematic issues: the first is the ambiguity of passive interpretations, the second is passive-related constructions, and the third is the frequency and use of the Japanese passive.

First, in terms of the ambiguity of standard passive interpretations, it should be pointed out that some direct passives can carry adversity meanings like indirect passives, and furthermore, some indirect passive sentences are not adversative but carry positively affected meanings. These are not exceptional cases and are often found in the Japanese language. In this respect, as standard interpretations break down, explanations of passive use can only be determined through the lexical meaning of the verbs in their given contexts (Martin, 1975, pp. 298-299). Because of this ambiguity in passive interpretations, there are many different labels for the Japanese passive, and this diversity in terminology results in a good deal of confusion.

Another problem has to do with passive-related phenomena such as honorific, spontaneous, and potential forms, which take the same morpheme *(ra)reru*. These constructions must be accounted for, because they are clearly related to the passive in Japanese.

A third set of problems arises in terms of the frequency and use of the passive in Japanese. Scholars have widely differing viewpoints, and this area has yet to be clearly defined in the literature.

In order to understand the Japanese passive today, a potential solution is to have a clearer idea of its origins, the course of its development over the centuries, and the influences of other languages on the form. Once we can see the Japanese passive in its historical context, it will enhance our understanding of its present-day functions.

Apart from the consideration of historical background, recent linguistic studies[9] attempt

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[8] In this paper, the Japanese passive is classified as direct and indirect. However, there are disagreements in the literature about these labels, especially for indirect passives, which are also described in a number of other ways. This issue will be discussed in the upcoming section 3.2.1.

[9] Although there are numerous studies of the passive in the literature, only important representative scholars will be introduced in this paper. Their arguments seem widely read and are often cited by other scholars.

to find a solution to the problems above and establish a comprehensive framework to theoretically explain the passive in Japanese. In general, research seems to have proceeded from syntax-based studies in the 1970s to analyses along semantic/pragmatic lines in more recent times. This paper will present several representative studies of the Japanese passive based on this research: (1) Kuno (1973) and Howard & Niyekawa-Howard (1976) as a typical syntactic approach, (2) Givón (1981), Okutsu (1983), and Kuno (1983) from the functional point of view, and finally (3) Shibatani's (1985) work based on a prototype approach.

Kuno (1973) and Howard & Niyekawa-Howard (1976), representing the syntactic standpoint, introduce what is known as Uniform Theory and Nonuniform Theory. Within their framework, the focus in passive analyses is on movements between active and passive sentences, such as "subject promotions" and "object promotions." However, while this type of approach may explain the differences between the direct and indirect passive at the sentence level, it fails to solve the problems of the standard approach, since the focus is too narrow to treat semantic factors.

Gradually, the necessity to account for semantic and pragmatic factors evoked another type of analysis based not only on syntax but also on meanings and functions. This approach can be represented by Givón (1981), Kuno (1983), and Okutsu (1983). However, although their research goes a long way towards explaining some of the ambiguities of the Japanese passive, the problem of passive-related constructions still remains.

Although Shibatani's (1985) approach can be regarded as being within a functional framework, his prototype analysis provides us with a wider scope for understanding the Japanese passive. He suggests that passives and other passive-related sentence forms can be depicted on a continuum. He postulates a theoretical construct, a prototypical passive, and suggests that different passive types, as well as other passive-related constructions, can be depicted on a continuum on the basis of the degree to which they share similarities with this prototype. Although this approach seems to have solved many of the problems underlying the Japanese passive, it still needs to be examined in more detail in light of other new approaches that are evolving. As a recent tendency, for example, cognitive linguistics is attempting to analyze the whole notion of voice in more depth, and more clarified approaches are expected in future studies.

3.1 Direct and Indirect Passives: The Standard Approach

Basically, English passives and Japanese direct passives are formed in similar ways. The direct object in an active sentence becomes the subject of the passive counterpart, and the original subject becomes the passive agent; the verb is also "passivized." Japanese direct passives invariably involve transitive verbs, have an active counterpart, and express pure passive meanings, as does the English passive (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, pp. 365–366; Tanimori, 1994, p. 307). For example:

	Active	*Passive*
(a)	Hanako-wa Taro-wo tatai-ta. (Hanako hit Taro.)	Taro-wa Hanako-ni tatak-are-ta. (Taro was hit by Hanako.)
(b)	Haha-ga kare-wo shika-tta. (His mother scolded him.)	Kare-wa haha-ni shika-rare-ta. (He was scolded by his mother.)

In example (a), the direct object *Taro* in the active sentence becomes the subject of the passive sentence with the addition of *wa*, and the transitive verb *tataku* (hit) is transformed to the passive form *tatak-are-ta* (was hit) with the addition of *(ra)reru*. The postposition *ni*[10] marks the passive agent, *Hanako*. Example (b) also illustrates the same process of passivization. These movements in forming direct passive sentences can be illustrated as follows:

NP1-*wa/ga* + NP2-*wo* + Vt → NP2-*wa/ga* + NP1-*ni* + Vt + *(ra)reru*

First, the direct object of the active sentence is promoted to the subject position. Notice that the direct object is marked with *wo* in the active sentence, but once it is promoted to the subject position, it is now followed by either *wa* or *ga*, which are markers for subjects. Second, the original subject of the active sentence becomes the passive agent and is marked by *ni*. Finally, the passive indicator *(ra)reru* is suffixed to the verbal root.

While Japanese direct passives may be a familiar form for English speakers because of their similarity to the English passive, there is another type of passive in Japanese which must be examined: the indirect passive. This type of passive can be formed from intransitive verbs and does not exist in English (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, p. 367). In providing a basic explanation of indirect passives, Kuno (1973, p. 302) claims that "the subject of the main sentence has been inadvertently affected by the action represented in the rest of the sentence. This connotation of suffering or inadvertent effect on the part of the main subject is completely lacking in pure passive sentences...." To make this point clear, let us consider the following examples:

(1) (a) Ame-ga fu-tta. (active)
(Rain fell.)

(b) Taro-wa ame-ni fu-rare-ta. (passive)
(literally, *"Taro was fallen by rain";
corresponding to the English, "Unfortunately, Taro was caught in the rain.")

(2) (a) Chichi-ga shin-da. (active)
(My father died.)

[10] The agent in direct passive sentences can also be marked by other particles, such as *niyotte, kara* (Martin, 1975, p. 296; Inoue, 1976; and Makino & Tsutsui, 1986), and *de* (Martin, ibid.), and each carries a different meaning. Also, Tsujimura (1996) assumes that there is a third type of passive called "*ni yotte* passive." This issue will be examined in more detail with historical background in the upcoming section 3.3.

(b) Hanako-wa chichi-ni shin-are-ta. (passive)
(literally, *"Hanako was died by her father";
corresponding to the English, "Hanako was adversely affected by her father's death.")

Example (1a) involves an intransitive verb *furu* (fall) and is not expected to have a passive counterpart. However, (1b) is perfectly grammatical, unlike in English. What is interesting syntactically about these indirect passives is that there is one extra noun phrase (NP) in each; i.e., *Taro* and *Hanako*. What is interesting semantically is that this type of passive expresses not only the simple fact that "it rained," but also the subject's negative feeling; i.e., "Taro was troubled by the rain." Similarly, (2b) expresses both the fact of *Hanako*'s father's death, as well as her sadness about the event. Due to this special connotation, indirect passives are often called "adversity passives" (Kuno, 1973, p. 144; Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, p. 368).[11] Based on the notions above, the general process of indirect passivization may be represented as follows:

NP1-*wa*/*ga* + Vi → New NP-*wa*/*ga* + NP1-*ni* + Vi + *(ra)reru*

First, the subject of the base verb appears with *ni*.[12] In this type of passive, the *ni*-phrase is obligatory, and without it, the sentence becomes ungrammatical.[13] Second, one extra NP appears in the indirect passive compared with its active counterpart, which becomes the main subject adversely influenced by the rest of the sentence. Third, as with direct passives, *(ra)reru* is attached to the verb root, indicating that the sentence is passive.

In summary, teaching materials for Japanese L2 learners generally provide the above type of explanation. Because the Japanese passive has a complex construction and many nuances, careful but simplified explanations are introduced, including some variations as seen in Kaigai Gijutsusya Kensyu Kyokai (1984), Hiroo Japanese Center (1989), Jorden (1990), and Tanimori (1994). Therefore, this standard approach is useful for Japanese L2 students in learning an overall framework for the passive in Japanese.

3.2 Current Controversies

The previous section has described the Japanese passive in a basic way, one which is commonly used in most teaching materials. From this perspective, the Japanese passive falls into two categories: direct and indirect (or adversity). However, as analyses are conducted

[11] In Japanese linguistics, there are many kinds of terminology for the passive. This will be discussed in the upcoming section 3.2.1.

[12] Tsujimura (1996, p. 295) claims that this *ni* is a Dative Case particle, not the postposition of direct passives.

[13] From the examples in the section, the following are unacceptable since they carry no Dative *ni*-phrase (Hoshi, cited in Tsujimura, ibid., p. 239): *Hanako-wa asa-made vaiorin-wo hik-are-ta (*Hanako was played the violin until morning); *Watashi-wa kyonen shin-are-ta. (*I was adversely affect by death last year).

in greater detail, important questions are raised, the answers to which have led to more in-depth approaches to the passive. There are three main types of problem: the first is related to the ambiguity of passive interpretations, the second is the need to account for other passive-related constructions, and the third is the difficulty of analyzing the frequency and use of the form.

3.2.1 Ambiguities

In terms of ambiguity, the following two issues need to be examined: (1) some direct ("pure") passive sentences can carry adversity implications; and (2) some indirect (adversity) passives can have positive effects. These relations are depicted below:

Japanese L2 Pedagogy		*Deeper Analysis*
(1) Direct passives: involve Vt, "pure" connotation	→	sometimes carry adversity implications, too—when this occurs, regarded as indirect passives
(2) Indirect passives: involve Vi, adversity connotation	→	sometimes the implications are not adversative but rather positive effects instead

First, it has been shown in earlier sections that adversity connotations can be associated with indirect passives deriving from intransitive verbs. However, some scholars, such as Howard & Niyekawa-Howard (1976, pp. 209-212), present many instances of direct ("pure") passive sentences expressing not only pure passive meanings but also having emotional implications (see also, Martin, 1975, p. 299; Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, pp. 367-368). For example:

Taro-wa Jiro-no biiru-wo non-da. (active)
(Taro drank Jiro's beer.)

Jiro-wa Taro-ni biiru-wo nom-are-ta. (passive)
(literally, "*Jiro was drunk his beer by Taro";
corresponding to the English, "Jiro was annoyed by Taro's drinking his beer.") (Makino & Tsutsui, ibid.)

With the standard approach, the example should be identified as a direct passive; indeed, the transitive verb *nomu* (drink) is used. However, in spite of this fact, the sentence carries not only a "pure" passive meaning but also an adversity meaning in that *Jiro* was adversely affected by *Taro*'s drinking beer. It implies that *Jiro* was annoyed in some way by *Taro*'s action, perhaps because the beer *Taro* drank belonged to *Jiro*, something which could never be fully explained by the basic approach.

Secondly, the standard argument assumes that indirect passives with intransitive verbs have adversity connotations. However, some writers claim that they do not always express "suffering" or "negatively affected" meanings; i.e., there are also indirect passive sentences

having "positive" implications (see Martin, 1975, pp. 298–299; Davison, 1980, pp. 58–59; Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, p. 368; and Tsujimura, 1996, p. 240). For example:

Boku-wa sensei-ni boku-no musuko-wo home-rare-ta.
(I had my child praised by the teacher.)

The adversity meaning is not at all detected in the example above. Rather, the teacher's act, "praising the child," positively affects the subject.

Numerous examples of these two types of ambiguity are cited by grammarians, but it is unclear whether the secondary connotations are the result of the passive morpheme, or the lexical content of the verb itself, or whether the whole affect is dependent on the context. In this regard, Martin (1975, p. 295) argues as follows: "Authentic sentences are often so stripped down that it is far from easy to find intact examples of the full grammar. We can only decide from context or outside information the proper interpretation...." (see also Jorden, 1990, pp. 156–159).

In summary, in simplified explanations that can often be found in teaching materials, direct passives are portrayed as deriving from transitive verbs and expressing "pure" passive meanings. However, as we have seen, some direct passive sentences can carry adversity implications as well. Similarly, standard literature describes indirect passives as being formed from intransitive verbs and carrying adversity meanings. However, as shown, the effect can sometimes also be positive. As a result, it appears that this classification into direct/indirect passives breaks down upon deeper analysis. Although these simplified explanations may be useful at early levels of Japanese L2 pedagogy, counterexamples strongly suggest that the passive form can express any and all of the above meanings depending on the context.

The ambiguity inherent in these secondary connotations has also led to another problem in understanding the Japanese passive, that of terminology. It should be pointed out that terminology for the Japanese passive varies from scholar to scholar, and no definitive agreement has yet been reached in this regard. For example, Japanese direct passives are also termed "pure" (Martin, 1975, p. 186; Kuno, 1973, p. 302), "translational," "normal" (Martin, op. cit., p. 287), "neutral" (Kuno, op. cit., p. 144), "ordinary" (ibid., p. 23) and "impersonal" (Mizutani, 1985, p. 117). Variations are also found in descriptions of indirect passives, such as "adversative" (Martin, 1975, p. 287; Howard & Niyekawa-Howard, 1976, p. 209), "victimizing" (Martin, op. cit., p. 295), "affective" (ibid., p. 311), "psychological" (ibid., p. 299), "suffering" (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, p. 368) and "personal" (Mizutani, 1985, p. 118). Moreover, there are disagreements among some grammarians in terms of whether sentences having an adversity meaning should even be included as passives. For instance, Backhouse (1993, p. 146) claims that "adversative and passive sentences are thus different sentence types, involving a different range of verbs." What this confusion in terminology implies is that analysis of the Japanese construction is not yet firmly established and this will be discussed in upcoming sections.

3.2.2 Passive–Related Constructions

In addition to an inability to deal with the ambiguity of the Japanese passive as discussed in the previous section, standard explanations found in most textbooks have a second important shortcoming: they cannot account for several passive–related constructions having the same affix *(ra)reru* but not expressing passive meaning. These include the honorific, spontaneous, and potential forms.

3.2.2.1 Honorific Form

In Japanese, when a speaker wants to show respect, this can be done by using a verb with the same affix *(ra)reru* as the passive, which is often called the honorific form.[14] Passive or honorific meanings must be identified through syntax and context (see, for example, Makino & Tsutsui, 1986; Tanimori, 1994). For instance:

e.g., Sensei–wa sono ryouri–wo tab–erare–ta.
- honorific: The teacher ate the meal [with polite nuances to the teacher].
- indirect (adversity) passives: Someone ate the meal and the teacher was unhappy.

The sentence in this example can carry a number of different meanings, which must be determined from context. If we assume that "*tab–erare–ta*" is an honorific in this case, it will indicate respect for the subject, *sensei* (the teacher), reflecting the vertical hierarchy of Japanese society; i.e., people are usually supposed to pay respect to "teachers" as a matter of course. In fact, if a speaker uses a verb form without *(ra)reru*, "Sensei–ga sono ryouri–wo *tabeta* (The teacher ate the meal [*without* polite nuances to the teacher])," it may sound too direct or rude to the teacher, and could even imply that there was something wrong with the teacher's act, such as a case in which the teacher ate the whole meal by him/herself. What is difficult, even for Japanese people, is that honorific forms are constructed in the same manner as passives and the correct connotation must be determined from the context.

3.2.2.2 Potential Form

Another passive–related construction that makes use of *(ra)reru* is the potential form.[15] For example:

Non–potential:
Watashi–wa tyuugokugo–wo hanasu.

[14] There is disagreement regarding terminology among scholars. For example, Martin (1975, p. 296) terms the honorific "subject–exalting passives," Jorden (1990, p. 156) the "honorific passive," and Whitman (1969, p. 102) the "polite active form." Note also that in the "*rareru*" type of honorific expression, the degree of politeness is lower than that of other honorific verbs, such as *o–V–ni naru*; e.g., o–tabe–ni–naru, "eat [with honor]" (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, p. 368).

[15] For a different point of view, see Martin (1975, p. 287), who regards the potential as a type of passive and terms it the "potential passive."

(I speak Chinese.)

Potential:
Watashi-*wa* tyuugokugo-*ga/wo* hanas-*eru.*
(I can speak Chinese.)

In these examples, while the non-potential sentence expresses only the fact of "speaking Chinese," with the addition of the *(ra)reru* morpheme, the potential form distinctly indicates the speaker's ability or skill in speaking the language.

This type of sentence expresses personal capability (Backhouse, 1993, p. 148), and the basic construction is that if there is an experiencer, the NP is usually marked with *wa* and the object of the action by either *ga* or *wo*[16] (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, p. 371; Backhouse, op. cit.).

Moreover, instead of *(ra)reru,* the shorter form *reru* is common in colloquial language (Makino & Tsutsui, 1986, p. 373; Backhouse, op. cit.).[17] For example:

taberu → tabe-*rareru* or tabe-*reru*
(eat) (can eat)

Of importance in this study, however, is the fact that in many cases, potential and passive constructions must be determined from syntax and context. For instance:

e.g., Sensei-wa sono ryouri-wo tab-erare-ta.
- potential: The teacher was able to eat the meal.
- indirect (adversity) passives: Someone ate the meal and the teacher was unhappy.
- [honorific: The teacher ate the meal (with polite nuances to the teacher)]. (see previous section)

Once again, the sentence in this example can carry not only honorific and indirect passive meanings but also potential connotations depending on the situation. If a potential meaning is assumed in this case, the sentence will indicate the ability of the subject to eat the meal; e.g., because the teacher did not dislike the meal, he/she was able to eat it. As with the situation of honorific forms, the appropriate interpretation must be identified through the context.

3.2.2.3 Spontaneous Form

Because the spontaneous form also makes use of the *(ra)reru* morpheme, it too is considered a passive-related construction (see Shibatani, 1985). For example:

[16] There are some exceptions in the selection and/or limitation of the use of *ga* or *wo*. See Makino & Tsutsui (1986, p. 372) and Backhouse (1993, pp. 148-149).

[17] This issue has been discussed at great length recently and some scholars insist that the shortened morpheme *reru* is now appropriate for the potential form. The Ministry of Education, however, still regards the traditional *rareru* as the official form.

Mukashi ga shinob-areru.
(An old time comes (spontaneously) to mind.) (ibid., p. 823)

Shibatani (ibid., p. 827) states that spontaneous forms are "constructions which express spontaneous occurrence—an event that automatically occurs, or a state that spontaneously obtains without the intervention of an agent." However, the spontaneous is very similar to the potential in interpretation, depending on context. In the above example, "Mukashi ga shinob-areru," can also have a potential meaning, "I can be led to think about the old days."[18]

3.2.3 Frequency and Use of the Japanese Passive

In section 2.2, we looked at basic functions of the English passive. It appears most often in academic writing due to its characteristic ability to convey objectivity and impersonal style. However, unlike English, although some scholars have noted general tendencies regarding the frequency and use of the Japanese passive, few empirical studies have actually been carried out which analyze how the passive is used in Japanese and in what situations. Indeed, Shibatani (personal communication, February 12, 1998) remarks that "there aren't very many studies dealing the frequency of Japanese passives." The reason why few empirical studies have yet to be carried out seems relevant to the polysemy of interpretation of the form. An exact interpretation of the Japanese passive and passive-related constructions depends to a large degree on the context in which they are found.

In spite of this difficulty, some scholars have attempted to broadly outline the situations in which the passive is used in Japanese. The most common presumption focuses on the subject of passive sentences. For example, Jorden (1990, p. 159) claims that "in spoken Japanese, the referent of a passive is regularly animate. In those rare instances in which it is inanimate, the conversion to the passive...does not have an adversative implication.... This type of usage is rather stiff and is more common in written Japanese" (see also, Martin, 1975, p. 296; Mizutani, 1985, p. 134). Although Backhouse (1993, pp. 146 & 147) does not mention characteristics of the subject, animate or inanimate, he presents a similar assumption in stating that "adversative sentences are particularly common in spoken Japanese.... [while] true [direct] passive sentences...are more widely used in written Japanese."

Another argument takes into account the historical background of the Japanese passive. For example, Nakamura (1966, p. 407) states:

> It is to be noted that today, as a consequence of the introduction of Western thought, the uses of the passive voice and the impersonal subject occur more frequently in Japanese writing.

[18] Martin (1975, p. 307) provides a different point of view and categorizes these forms as "spontaneous potential" and "spontaneous passive." It is therefore highly debatable that a clear boundary between the spontaneous and potential actually exists. Furthermore, in much of the literature, the relationship of the spontaneous to the passive is largely undefined.

> Originally, however, with some rare exceptions, the subject of [passive] sentences was confined to human beings or living beings, especially the former, and also to animals high in the scale of intelligent creatures.

However, Okutsu (1983) in calculating the number of passive sentences with inanimate subjects in several representative Japanese classics, concludes that inanimate subject-passives are often found in old Japanese, which shows the origins of the form long ago in the Japanese language.

The nature of the frequency and use of the passive in Japanese has not been studied in enough detail to draw reliable conclusions. Nevertheless, we could hypothesize that indirect passives predominate in spoken Japanese due to their emotional connotations, while direct passives can more often be found in the written form of the language. However, important distinctions in passive use must also be noted with regard to the various styles of Japanese writing such as academic or scientific works, as well as both traditional and modern literature. In literary writing, we might expect that indirect passives would be found more frequently than in scientific descriptions, especially in genres such stage plays and novels. In addition, in terms of scientific and academic writing, an additional problem arises which is related to a more recent construction called the *niyotte*-passive, which will be discussed later in detail in section 3.3.2.3. Moreover, in all kinds of spoken and written interactions in Japanese, it is difficult to identify which form—passive, spontaneous, potential, or honorific—is being used. At any rate, there are so few empirical studies on the frequency and use of the passive in Japanese that we have no data to refer to on this issue. Meantime, some scholars have argued that the complexity of the Japanese passive may be related to the process of evolution of the language. The next section will focus on the historical background of the Japanese passive in the hope of clarifying this issue.

3.3 Historical Background

Once it has been established that the Japanese *(ra)reru* morpheme can be interpreted in many ways depending on the context, we now face the question of why this happens in Japanese. In order to answer this question, we will go back to the origins of the passive and examine changes that took place in the form over time. In this section, we will investigate the history of the Japanese passive and passive-related constructions in detail and show how they have evolved and developed. First of all, we will present a representative argument from the literature about the origin of the Japanese passive and its indigenous forms. Then, we will trace its development in Japanese literature from medieval times to the present, as well as noting certain important influences from other languages in recent times.

3.3.1 Development of the Japanese Passive

As we saw in section 3.2.2, the Japanese passive morpheme *(ra)reru* can carry four types

of interpretation: passive, honorific, potential, and spontaneous. From the standpoint of the evolution of these four forms, a fundamental assumption is that the spontaneous form developed first and evolved into the passive, potential, and honorific forms.[19] Araki (1994, pp. 55–56), for example, explains that a characteristic Japanese way of thinking, which he describes as "things coming out *naturally*," underlies the four forms; i.e., the passive and passive-related constructions imply that actions/situations expressed are caused not by the agent's intention but come about naturally.[20] Konoshima (1973, p. 99) concurs:

> Regarding the concept of the passive form, one thing that we need to pay attention to is that it is inseparably linked to the potential and spontaneous forms, and this relates to an essential characteristic of the Japanese passive. Passives in Western languages, at least in their modern forms, simply express a meaning in which the subject of a passive sentence receives the action done by others; on the other hand, the real meaning of the Japanese passive is that the action of a passive sentence is carried out without consideration of the subject's will/desire. Therefore, the connotation of spontaneous or potential action arises. (our translation)

Thus the assumption that the passive and other passive-related constructions evolved from the spontaneous form seems most appropriate and is supported by many scholars (see also *Kokugogaku Daigiten*, 1980, p. 61; Koike, 1994, pp. 195–196).

As the Japanese passive developed, an indigenous form gradually took shape. Kinsui (1992, p. 14) examined a number of example sentences from Old Japanese literature and characterizes the indigenous Japanese passive as follows:

> (a) Passive agents are marked by *ni*.
> (b) Passive sentences express a meaning in which the subject of a passive sentence is physically and/or psychologically affected by the agent; thus the agent must exist before the action done to the subject occurs. (our translation)

To summarize, it is important to take into account not only present-day grammatical characteristics but also the historical background of these forms in order to understand the passive and passive-related constructions in Japanese more fully. Based on arguments developed by Kinsui (1992) and Konoshima (1973), the next section will focus on the search for evidence of the development of the passive in Japanese literature.

3.3.2 Evidence of Development from Japanese Literature

In tracing the evolution of the Japanese passive, we will examine its historical development in three parts: (1) early evidence of the passive, spontaneous, and potential

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[19] Yamada (cited in Araki, 1994) presents the opposite point of view, suggesting that the use of *(ra)reru* developed in the passive first, gradually expanding into the spontaneous, potential, then finally honorific forms. However, as he has little support in the literature, we will not deal with this hypothesis here.

[20] Araki (1994, pp. 55–69) provides detailed examples of how this characteristic is found in the language.

constructions in a collection of Japanese poetry called the *Manyousyuu* (760 AD); (2) the development of the *(ra)reru* interpretation of honorific forms by the twelfth century; and (3) an expansion of the use of the Japanese passive through the influence of foreign languages from 1850 to the present day.

3.3.2.1 *Manyousyuu* (around 760 AD)

During the sixth century, the influence of Korea brought the introduction of the Chinese script into Japan, which enabled the Japanese to keep records for the first time in history. In the eighth century, one of the important literary achievements is the great anthology of traditional Japanese poetry known as the *Manyousyuu*, a collection of *waka* (a traditional Japanese poem of thirty-one syllables). This compilation includes about 4,500 poems composed by a wide range of individuals from those in higher positions in society to ordinary people. These poems reflect typical Japanese "sentiments" of the sixth and seventh centuries. In fact, Sansom (1974, p. 93) suggests that "the very fact that the first important literary achievement, apart from historical records, is a collection of native verse testifies to the singular eminence of poetry in the national tradition."

In the *Manyousyuu*, we can already find many examples of the passive and other passive-related constructions, with the exception of honorific forms. At that time, the morpheme used was not *(ra)reru* but *(ra)yu* which is the old form of *(ra)reru*. Konoshima (1973, pp. 99—103) presents many examples in which the morpheme *(ra)yu* is used in passive, potential, and spontaneous forms in the *Manyousyuu*. From this fact, it can be concluded that use of the old passive morpheme *(ra)yu* was firmly established by the eighth century.

3.3.2.2 The Nara Period (710–794) to the Heian Period (794–1192)

For about 500 years from the Nara period, when the *Manyousyuu* was edited, to the Heian period,[21] two changes in the Japanese passive and passive-related constructions can be found: (1) the morpheme *(ra)yu* goes through a transition to *(ra)reru*, which we now use in modern times; and (2) during the transition, another interpretation of *(ra)reru* evolves: the honorific form. The transition of *(ra)yu* to *(ra)reru* begins in the Nara period and Konoshima (1973, pp. 101—103) presents a number of examples of this transition. The change becomes fully fixed by the Heian period. With the transition to the *(ra)reru* morpheme, the honorific interpretation is added to the other three already-established forms. Some scholars have suggested that the honorific *(ra)reru* construction existed prior to this time, but as Konoshima (ibid., p. 106, our translation) argues, these early honorific forms are "rather a kind of potential." He states that they originally were used to represent "the abilities or capabilities of higher status people, such as emperors and ministers, in accomplishing tasks because of

[21] The period of some 80 years from the establishment of the capital in Nara in 710 until its transfer to Kyoto in 794 is called the Nara period. The new capital in Kyoto was named Heian-kyo, the Capital of Peace and Tranquillity. The Heian period was named after this capital and lasted 400 years.

their power (ibid.)." These constructions later developed into modern honorific forms.

Moreover, Konoshima further points out that the degree of respect in the "pre-honorific forms" is very low and that some apparently honorific sentences can be interpreted in other ways, such as in terms of passive, spontaneous, or potential functions (ibid.). Thus the use of *(ra)reru* as an honorific is not frequent in the early Heian period.

Around the late eleventh century when the Heian period ends, various new types of Japanese literature appear, not only traditional *waka* and historical records but also diaries describing the life of the Imperial Court by people in court service. At the same time, the *(ra)reru* use as an honorific becomes marked, and we can find a number of examples in the literature of the time. Konoshima (p. 109−118) suggests that a reason why this usage dramatically increases is that casual writing such as in diaries could accept the new honorific forms more easily than traditional Japanese literature. These forms become more frequently used later and by the Edo period (1603−1868), the *(ra)reru* honorific dominates Japanese *keigo* (polite) expressions, a trend which continues into the present.

In summary, the four basic functions of the *(ra)reru* morpheme which we see in modern times were established by the eleventh century. Over time, however, the Japanese passive was also gradually forced to adapt itself to foreign language influences, especially in the nineteenth century.

3.3.2.3 Modern Times

From 1650 to 1850, Japan shut its borders and trade with foreign countries was prohibited except with Holland, China, and Korea. This is known as *sakoku*, the seclusion policy.[22] However, when the Japanese government opened the country to foreign relations and trade in the 1850s, and a new government was established in 1868, overseas contacts drastically increased and people became interested in new scientific achievements and technologies brought by Western countries. In order to study these new industrial and academic fields, there was more necessity to learn other languages, such as English, French, German, etc.

In learning these languages, an interesting issue related to the passive arose: the problem of a new form of the passive in foreign languages. As we saw in previous sections, the Japanese passive originally connotes the subject's feelings (mainly adversity) while passives in languages such as English convey objective or impersonal nuances. Because of this influence, especially in the process of accessing modern technology, the passive in Japanese became modified through the development of a new postposition, *niyotte*, which came to

[22] From 1612 to 1639, many laws that banned commercial relationships with other countries, except China and the Netherlands, were issued, and by 1650, Japan became isolated from the world. There are mainly two reasons why this was done: first, the Shogunate feared the power of Christianity in creating opposition to its rules; and second, the Shogunate wanted to gather all trade under its control. For these two reasons, the country became closed to the outside for more than two centuries.

be used more frequently in translating the passive forms of other languages.[23] This type of Japanese passive is now called the *niyotte*-passive (Konoshima, 1973, p. 122; Kinsui, 1997) and is particularly common in academic and scientific writing in Japanese today:

> *Ni* is one of the particularly old and basic particles in Japanese. It is used with an extremely high frequency, and its meaning and function have not changed much since Old Japanese. It denotes roles of location, time, goal, resultant state, cause and so forth, and has been used as an agent marker in the passive and the causative since ancient times. On the other hand, *niyotte* is a particle derived by compounding the particle *ni* and the conjunctive form of a verb *yoru*. Its early form *niyori* or *niyorite* was often used. There are some other postpositions derived by compounding a particle and a verb, such as *ni-tuite* 'about', *ni-oite* 'in/at', *ni-totte* 'by means of', *nikansite* 'in respect of', *o-motte* 'with', and *o-tuuzite* 'through'. The *kanbun* reading classics [word-for-word translation] of Chinese is the origin of many of them.... *Niyotte* in the *niyotte*-passive arose through the appropriation of *niyotte* with a 'cause/reason' meaning to the Dutch preposition *door* 'through'; the *kanbun* style as such does not have any *niyotte*-passive sentences. (Kinsui, 1997, pp. 770−771)[24]

In other words, there was a type of passive form which existed in Western languages but not in Japanese, and as translation from these languages into Japanese increased due to the import of technology and science, the *niyotte*-passive started functioning to express direct passive meanings that were not originally found in Japanese.[25]

As a culmination of all these developments over time, the modern Japanese passive, in both its direct and indirect forms, came into being. The history of the passive in Japanese provides invaluable background knowledge for a deeper understanding of the ambiguities and complexities of interpretation associated with the form. In more recent times, there are many scholars who are conducting research into the Japanese passive and passive-related constructions from a more theoretical perspective. These studies are being done in specific linguistic areas and will be introduced in the next section.

3.4 Linguistic Analyses

In the previous sections we looked at how teaching textbooks generally present the Japanese passive, what kind of unsolved problems arise as standard approaches to explaining the form break down, and what the history of the Japanese language shows as evidence for the development of the passive and passive-related constructions. In this section, several major linguistic studies will be introduced in an attempt to explain the problems discussed so far.

[23] For further details on the structure and function of the *niyotte*-passive from a historical perspective, see Kinsui, 1997, pp. 773−776.

[24] Sunagawa (1984) examines how the *ni*- and *niyotte*-passive are used in modern Japanese.

[25] It should be pointed out that, as Kinsui (1997, p. 773) argues, the postposition *niyotte* is not always used as a translational equivalent of English *by*. But the *by*-passive in literal translation to Japanese always appears as the *niyotte*-passive.

From the early 1970s to the present, linguistic studies have developed along a continuum from initial syntax-based analyses to more recent semantic/pragmatic approaches. Several representative studies will be presented here: (1) Kuno (1973) and Howard & Niyekawa-Howard (1976) for syntax-based analyses, (2) Givón (1981), Okutsu (1983), and Kuno (1983) for functional approaches, and finally (3) Shibatani's (1985) prototype analysis.

3.4.1 Kuno (1973) and Howard & Niyekawa-Howard (1976)

Syntax-based approaches dominated passive analyses in the 1970s. For example, Kuno (1973, p. 301) focuses on transformations in the formation of direct and indirect passives and presumes that each type of sentence has a different construction at base; i.e., direct passives are derived from one sentence (technically termed the "simplex-deep-structure"), while indirect passives come from two sentences ("the complex-deep-structure") (see Kuno, 1973, for a detailed explanation). This type of approach is termed Nonuniform Theory by Howard & Niyekawa-Howard (1976, p. 204).

On the other hand, Howard & Niyekawa-Howard (1976, p. 204) contend that both direct and indirect passives have a single type of deep structure; i.e., at the base of the derivation of both types of passive is a complex-deep-structure. They term this approach the Uniform Theory (for details, see Howard & Niyekawa-Howard, 1976).

Both analyses succeed in providing a definition of direct and indirect passive with respect to sentence structure. However, semantic/pragmatic questions cannot be answered on the basis of these syntactic approaches and they also fail to provide adequate explanations for secondary meanings. In recent years, these syntax-based approaches have come in for considerable criticism (see, for example, Givón, 1981, p. 166; Shibatani, 1985, p. 821) and are no longer at the forefront of research into the Japanese passive. Therefore, we will not provide any further detailed explanations.

3.4.2 Givón (1981), Okutsu (1983), and Kuno (1983)

As the shortcomings of syntax-based approaches became apparent, semantic and functional considerations in understanding the passive became the focus of many linguistic studies. Unlike syntax-based analyses, functional approaches pay more attention to semantic/pragmatic factors. As described in section 2.2, Givón (1981, p. 168), for example, characterizes passive functions in terms of clausal topic assignment, impersonalization, and de-transitivization. Okutsu (cited in Shibatani, 1985, p. 831) also agrees that one of the main functions of the passive is to shift the focus of the sentence from the agent to the patient:

> But isn't it uneconomical to have two sentence patterns [i.e., active and passive] that express the same meaning? As discussed below, it has to do with the difference of whether the speaker imposes his own viewpoint on the agent or on the patient. There lies the meaning of the existence of the passive. If the speaker looks at the event from the agent's point of view, an active sentence is obtained; and if he looks at it from the patient's point of view, a passive sentence is chosen.

Moreover, Kuno (1983) revises his earlier (1973) argument, and combines elements of functionalism with syntactic factors in an approach called functional syntax (Takami, 1995, p. 10). Within this framework, Kuno (1983, p. 205) presents a concept of "involvement" in order to explain the semantic ambiguity of the passive; i.e., adversity meanings are dependent on the degree to which the subject of a passive sentence is involved in the situation.

Unlike syntax-based analyses, these varied functional approaches are more successful in dealing with the semantic ambiguities of the passive. However, once we look at the passive-related forms discussed previously such as honorific, spontaneous, and potential forms, it is clear that functional approaches are still too limited to explain these constructions satisfactorily.

3.4.3 Shibatani (1985)

Shibatani's (1985) prototype approach is perhaps the first comprehensive framework taking into account both passive and passive-related constructions in Japanese. Prototype analysis is based on the study of language typologies and the search for substantive universals across languages. Typologists typically make use of "family-resemblance" or prototype notions in comparative linguistic studies (Gumperz & Levinson, 1996, pp. 134−135). In analyzing the passive, Shibatani (op. cit., p. 821) first reconsiders earlier linguistic approaches, and remarks:

> While transformational studies have been most successful in explicating syntactic relationships among several constructions, the kinds of correlations among construction types examined here are beyond the scope of the transformational framework, which is too narrow in its perspectives. The same is true with other, more recent, formal approaches to syntax, such as Relational Grammar.

He then focuses on the fact that the passive construction in many languages of the world is related to a number of other constructions such as the reflexive, the reciprocal, etc., and from this perspective, he presents his prototype analysis as a solution to the problems of explaining the passive. He proposes a framework for understanding the passive in which "various constructions exist along a continuum; certain ones are prototypical, others are similar to the prototype to a limited degree, and still others share no similarities with the prototype" (ibid., p. 822).

Before analyzing the correlations between the passive and passive-related constructions along this continuum, he points out that these phenomena can be measured in a pragmatic way, and not strictly syntactically nor semantically (ibid., p. 825). He ascertains that the primary pragmatic function of the passive in Japanese can be termed "agent defocusing." While Givón (1981) and Okutsu (1983) pay more attention to topicalization, Shibatani (ibid., p. 830) disagrees:

It is undeniable that all three functions [i.e., clausal-topic assignment, impersonalization, and de-transitivization,] motivate passive clauses, depending on specific circumstances: however, I want to claim that the primary function is that of 'agent defocusing'.... My position thus differs from other recent functional approaches to passives, in which the topicalization aspect has been emphasized.

Based on this argument, he proposes a passive prototype of the Japanese passive for pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, and morphological properties, characterizing a range of passive-related constructions as illustrated below (ibid., pp. 837-839):

- Honorific:
...honorifics are most easily associated with the notion of agent defocusing. A universal characteristic of honorific speech lies in its indirectness; and one of the clear manifestations of this is avoidance of the singling out of an agent which refers to the addressee, the speaker, or the person mentioned in the sentence. Defocusing of an agent in some way is thus an integral component of the honorific mechanism.

- Spontaneous:
Defocusing of an agent is highly germane to spontaneous events and states. An event predicated of an agent is basically causative; i.e., an event is brought about by an agent. But an event dissociated from an agent is one occurring spontaneously. Thus a sentence with a defocused agent may be utilized to describe a spontaneous event.

- Potential:
It is only one small step from the spontaneous to the potential. An event that occurs spontaneously has a strong propensity to happen. If this automatic happening is negated, then a reading of impotentiality is implied.... A generalization of the spontaneous/potential correlation leads to the positive potential reading of an agent-defocusing form, as in Japanese.

Organizing these properties as above, Shibatani tentatively postulates the correlation of passive and the passive-related constructions on a continuum, based on a prototypical passive, the primary function of which is agent-defocusing. On the basis of this prototype, passive-related phenomena can be accounted for.

Finally, Shibatani (ibid., p. 841) mentions a major semantic problem of the Japanese passive, adversity meanings:

The affectedness of the passive subject derives basically from the fact that it is a patient. In many languages (e.g., Japanese), the affectedness of the patient subject in a passive is more pronounced than the patient object of an active sentence. This is presumably because of the difference in the degree of focus between subject and object. Subject position, being the highest

> focus position, has the effect of highlighting the semantic aspect of the affectedness inherent in the patient. The affected nature of the passive subject, when strongly felt, may lead to the use of passive morphology/syntax in a situation where the subject is indirectly affected by an event.

Thus, as Shibatani (ibid., p. 842) notes, the adversity passive in Japanese "illustrates extended use of passive morphology.... These passives differ from the prototypical passive in that they involve an increase of syntactic valency."

Shibatani's prototype analysis is perhaps the most comprehensive explanation to date for understanding the Japanese passive and passive-related constructions. By conceptually placing these constructions along a continuum, based on a prototype-passive, this approach seems to be able to account for similarities and differences between passive and passive-related phenomena that earlier studies failed to address. Nevertheless, Shibatani (ibid., p. 822) states that some passive-related constructions share *no* similarities with the prototype, but if this is the case, how can these forms be regarded as related? In addition, as he points out, there are many exceptional cases violating the prototype structure. This approach thus needs to be examined in more detail, and the notion of "prototype" more comprehensively defined.

4. Conclusions

The methodology for conducting contrastive studies normally involves a two-step process of description and comparison, as well as the provision for pedagogical advice in teaching target items. In previous sections, detailed descriptions of the passive in English and Japanese were presented in roughly parallel though distinct frameworks, but as should be evident from the results, the establishment of a passive-based, comparative frame of reference between the two languages is not feasible at this time. This is due to two main factors. Firstly, although there is some functional overlap between the English and Japanese forms, in many ways they are fundamentally incommensurable. More importantly, however, the Japanese passive itself remains poorly understood. Although areas of confusion and dispute continue to exist in terms of the English passive, and a good deal more empirical evidence needs to be gathered concerning the frequency of passive use, the basic features of the form are relatively well documented. The protean nature of the Japanese passive, on the other hand, is responsible for numerous intractable research problems which seem far from resolution. Moreover, despite intensive research efforts in recent years, models of analysis and theoretical approaches continue to change, while comprehensive empirical studies remain almost non-existent. Because solutions to these and other problems do not appear to be possible at present, the conclusions reached in this section are necessarily tentative.

Of central importance in resolving issues related to the Japanese passive is the fact that the form conveys an extremely wide range of meanings, many of which are ambiguous, and

some of which overlap with other grammatical constructions. In the standard approach to presenting the form in Japanese, direct passives are said to be formed from transitive verbs and express "pure" passive meaning, while indirect passives are derived from intransitive verbs and express adversity meanings. However, in some instances, direct ("pure") passives can carry adversity implications, whereas indirect (adversity) passives can have positive effects (section 3.2.1). Furthermore, the *rareru* morpheme is also used in passive-related constructions such as the spontaneous, potential, and honorific forms, with the result that in many cases it is only possible to distinguish between these constructions at the level of context (section 3.2.2). Although a number of researchers have attempted to provide explanations within specific theoretical models (section 3.4), the problem of how to distinguish between Japanese passive types, as well as how these constructions can effectively be presented pedagogically, remains to be solved.

As stated above, many Japanese passives convey affective connotations of a covert nature, and it seems reasonable to assume that this use of the form will most often be found in spoken discourse, as the indirect expression of emotional nuances is an everyday occurrence in Japanese life. Empirical studies are rare, however, and as noted previously, a significant obstacle in any research design is the difficulty investigators experience in distinguishing between passive types, as well as between the passive itself and passive-related constructions. Furthermore, no evidence is available at present concerning which of the passive types is more frequently used in conversational Japanese, the direct or indirect. In addition, the Japanese passive is increasingly employed in written discourse of a scientific or technical nature. In English, the passive construction conveys a sense of objectivity and impersonality in these contexts, but it is not clear from research findings whether these expressive effects occur in the same way in Japanese. If they do, the Japanese passive would carry a spectrum of meanings ranging from the affective (both adversative and benefactive) on the one hand, to the objective and impersonal on the other. A number of questions need to be asked, however: Do these connotations coincide with indirect or direct passive types? Do they correspond directly to specific spoken and written contexts? In written discourse, how does the translational *ni-yotte* passive interact with traditional forms of the verb? Unfortunately, no definitive answers seem possible at the present time.

Finally, although in many circumstances the passive seems to have distinctly different functions in English and Japanese, there is also a degree of overlap, coinciding with the narrower range of meaning associated with the English construction, and this overlap can be successfully exploited for pedagogical purposes. As stated in section 4.2, grammatical structures should be learned in relation to specific purposes and communicative acts, and in the case of the English passive, the construction can be most effectively taught within the context of written academic discourse. This function should be easily accessible cross-linguistically to L2 students studying in both languages, although as Niyekawa (1968) and Watabe et al. (1991) point out, there is a tendency for Japanese-speaking English L2 learners to transfer affective notions into English in passive contexts where they do not exist,

as well as to form passives from intransitive verbs, and to restrict their usage to animate subjects. The so-called adversative passive, however, is likely to be highly problematic for English-speaking Japanese L2 learners. Not only is this function difficult to present to students pedagogically, it will probably be viewed as unknown and potentially hazardous territory by native English speakers, who will have little understanding of the ramifications of such indirect expressions of emotion, as well as a natural tendency to express affective meaning more directly. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that this use of the passive will most often simply be avoided by students, although most such inferences are notoriously difficult to verify empirically.

In conclusion, it is clear that a good many questions about the passive remain to be answered, and that much of our knowledge of the construction in both languages is imprecise and incomplete. It will be the task of future researchers to redress these inadequacies, however, and it is our hope that this present study will have been of some value in contributing to their efforts.

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(Received Sep. 30, 1998)