

## SHORT ESSAY ON “LONG” PASSIVE

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**Abstract**

“Long” passive is not long, that is, not non-local, and it is a grammatical epiphenomenon. Cross-linguistically it appears to be uncommon and inhomogeneous. “Yet there is method in it.” In [S[VO]] languages, a small number of verbs that normally take an infinitival complement are used as re-analysed quasi-auxiliaries. This is the case, for instance, in Romance. On the other hand, in virtually all OV-languages, these verbs plus numerous verbs of a subclass of control verbs are – predictably – used as optionally clustering verbs. Quasi-auxiliaries are a subset of clustering verbs in OV. The clause-union effect of clustered verbs creates the improper impression of a ‘long’, that is, not locally operating passive construction. In the empirical reality, however, it is passive applied to the verb cluster of a simple clause. Finally, there is one outlier, namely ‘try’ and its cross-linguistic equivalents, which appears to be a grammatical illusion, aka a case of acceptable ungrammaticality. ‘Long’ passive is the respective standard passive construction applied under atypical conditions. These conditions determine how it is fitted into the grammatical structure in a grammatically well-formed way in the respective languages.

**1. Background**

In the literature, the term “long passive” is used inconsistently. So, we first should clarify what is meant by it in this paper. The concept – the direct object of the main verb of a non-finite complement ends up as the subject of the clause of the superordinate, passivised verb – only refers to the base relation of a derived subject. This covers two grammatically different cases, however. In one case, which is the unspectacular one, the object of the dependent verb ends up as the subject of the clause of the superordinate verb due to subject-to-subject raising.

Here is an illustration from English (1), with (1c) as ECM-construction with passivised matrix clause and passivised infinitival complement. Engdahl (2022) as well as Lødrup (2022), for instance, subsume the Scandinavian counterparts of such constructions – passivised matrix verb and passivised infinitival verb – as instances of long passive. In these constructions, the ‘long’ thing is only the length of the chain consisting of *local* links, from the matrix-subject position to the object position of the infinitival verb (1c).

- (1) a. He expects [anyone to accept this analysis].                      ECM infinitive  
       b. He expects [this analysis to be accepted].                      passive in the complement  
       c. *This analysis* is expected [-- to be [accepted --]<sub>VP</sub>].           object-to-subject-to-subject

The phenomenon to be dealt with in this essay is the more intriguing and theoretically more challenging case of – grant me the term – an *apparently* “truly long” passive. In this case, in a construction with an infinitival verb, passivization of the matrix predicate triggers the *immediate* switch of the direct object of the (active) infinitival verb to the subject of the matrix clause. German is a handy language for exemplifying this construction, which is ruled out in English and languages like English, at least in their standard contexts of usage.

Here are some pertinent facts; see Haider (1986), (1991), (2010: 20, 313, 319-320). A non-

negligible subset of German control verbs, such as *aufhören* (stop), *beabsichtigen* ('intend'), *beginnen* (begin), *erlauben* (allow), *gestatten* (permit), *vergessen* (forget), *versäumen* (miss, fail), *versuchen* (attempt), *verweigern* (refuse), *wagen* (dare), alternates between two types of complementation, illustrated in (2a) vs. (2b). (2a) is the typical case with a control infinitive (3a), that is, as transitive subject-control verbs with an infinitival object clause. (2b) is the intriguing case. Verbal agreement (and case, which is neutralized in German plurals) betrays that in (2b), the object argument of the infinitival verb functions as the subject. Only the governing verb *beabsichtigen* (intend) is passivised while the infinitival verb remains unchanged and active.

(2) a. Klauseln, die<sub>Acc-pl</sub> zu verwenden beabsichtigt wurde<sub>sg</sub>.

clauses that to use intended was

'clauses that were intended to be used'

b. Klauseln, die<sub>Nom-pl</sub> zu verwenden beabsichtigt wurden<sub>pl</sub>.<sup>1</sup>

clauses that to use intended were<sub>pl</sub>.

'clauses that were intended to be used'

The structural differences between (2a) and (2b) are as follows. In (2a), the infinitival verb heads the VP of an infinitival clause (3a). (2b), on the other hand has the form of (3b), namely the form of a mono-sentential 'clause union' construction, with the infinitival verb as part of the passivized verbal cluster. A detailed analysis of the phenomenon is presented in Haider (2010: 310-322). In that book section, sixteen independent facts are adduced to confirm that the relevant structural difference lies in the sentence structure, with a *clausal* infinitive complement on the one hand and a *mono-clausal* structure, with the infinitive verb as part of the *verbal cluster* of a simple clause, on the other hand.

(3) a. dass [PRO diese Klauseln<sub>Acc</sub> zu verwenden]<sub>CP</sub> beabsichtigt wurde<sub>sg</sub>.

that these clauses to use intended was

'that it was intended to use the clauses'

b. dass diese Klauseln<sub>Nom</sub> [[zu verwenden beabsichtigt] wurden<sub>pl</sub>]<sub>VC</sub> (= verbal cluster)

that these clauses to use intended were

'that the clauses were intended to be used'

A collateral effect should be mentioned in passing. Unmistakable examples of the mono-clausal construction are rare but nevertheless easy to identify in sufficiently large corpora of German. The low frequency seems to be the reason why AI-operated translation programs fail to process them correctly. Both, Google-Translator as well as DeepL wrongly translated (4a) as (4b) and (4c), respectively, while the correct translation would be (4d)

(4) a. der Grad, in welchem die königlichen Rechte zu wahren versäumt wurden<sup>2</sup>

*the extent in which    the royal rights    to protect neglected were*

<sup>1</sup> [https://360.lexisnexis.at/d/entscheidungen-ris/ogh\\_70b11813y/u\\_zivil\\_OGH\\_2013\\_JJT\\_20130904\\_OGH0002\\_0\\_19834305e7](https://360.lexisnexis.at/d/entscheidungen-ris/ogh_70b11813y/u_zivil_OGH_2013_JJT_20130904_OGH0002_0_19834305e7)

This is not a novel phenomenon. From 1850: [https://www.google.at/books/edition/Verhandlungen\\_der\\_St%C3%A4nde\\_Versammlung\\_de/IIZKAAAACAAJ?hl=de&gbpv=1&dq=%22zu+verwenden+beabsichtigt+wurden%22&pg=PA412&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.at/books/edition/Verhandlungen_der_St%C3%A4nde_Versammlung_de/IIZKAAAACAAJ?hl=de&gbpv=1&dq=%22zu+verwenden+beabsichtigt+wurden%22&pg=PA412&printsec=frontcover):

i. Unteroffiziere ..., welche bei der Neubildung der Truppen zu verwenden beabsichtigt wurden

NCOs


... who in the reorganisation (of) the troops to use intended were

'NCOs who were intended to be used in the reorganisation of the troops'

<sup>2</sup> <https://books.google.at/books?id=RmUAAAACAAJ&pg=PA133&lpg=PA133&dq=%22in+welchem+die+k%C3%B6niglichen+Rechte+zu+wahren+vers%C3%A4umt+wurden%22&source=bl&ots=3mIM-FJsPdh&sig=ACfU3U1VJRS7JpYXuzPPDy4JOt3L7arXlw&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiGic6VzeKHAXX27bslHbqcf0EQ6AF6BAGOEAM#v=onepage&q=%22in%20welchem%20die%20k%C3%B6niglichen%20Rechte%20zu%20wahren%20vers%C3%A4umt%20wurden%22&f=false>

- b. #the degree to which the royal rights were neglected (Google translator)
- c. #the degree to which royal rights have been neglected (DeepL)
- d. the extent to which it was neglected to protect royal rights correct version
- ‘the extent to which the protection of royal rights was neglected’

Verb-clustering is not restricted to single infinitival verbs, as in (4a). The two translation programs master (5a), but the English translation which they offer for (5b) is a word-by-word glossing that is grammatically wrong. Chat-GPT, however, suggests a fully correct translation (5c) and, when explicitly asked, it identifies the DeepL and Google translations of (5b) as ungrammatical.

- (5) a. dass [diesen Kollegen<sub>Acc.</sub> zu informieren zu versuchen] vergessen wurde  
 that [[this colleague to inform] to try] forgotten was  
 ‘that they forgot to try to inform this colleague’  
 “that it was forgotten to try to inform this colleague“ (Google Tr. & DeepL)  
 „that trying to inform this colleague was forgotten“ (Google Transl.)
- b. dass dieser Kollege<sub>Nom.</sub> [zu informieren zu versuchen vergessen wurde]<sub>VC</sub>  
 that this colleague to inform to try begun was  
 ‘that they began to try to inform this colleague’  
 “\*that this colleague was forgotten to try to inform” (Google Tr. & DeepL)
- c.  The grammatically correct English translation of the German sentence "dass dieser Kollege zu informieren zu versuchen vergessen wurde" is:  
 "that trying to inform this colleague was forgotten."

Compared to German, the number of verbs that enter a corresponding infinitival clause-union structure in the Romance languages, as described first by Aissen & Perlmutter (1983), is extremely limited. According to Cinque (2006: 65-69), verbs which take a sentential infinitival complement lexically signaled by ‘di’ ‘a’ or ‘per’ in Italian are excluded (6a-b’), except for *continuare* (continue), *finire*, (stop) and *iniziare/cominciare* (begin). The German counterparts (6c, d) are generally acceptable, however.

- (6) a. \*Las paredes fueron tratadas de pintar ayer. Spanish  
 the walls were tried to paint yesterday
- b. \*Fu cercato/tentato di aggiustare (da Gianni).<sup>3</sup> Italian  
 (it) was tried to mend (by Gianni).
- b’. \*Fu provato ad aggiustare (da Gianni).  
 (it) was tried to mend (by G.).
- c. Die Wände wurden gestern zu streichen versucht/begonnen/beabsichtigt/vergessen/...  
 the walls were yesterday to paint tried/begun/intended/forgotten /....
- d. Sie wurden zu reparieren versucht<sup>4</sup>/begonnen/beabsichtigt/vergessen/...  
 they were to mend tried/begun/intended/forgotten /....

<sup>3</sup> Actual usage seems to challenge Cinque’s claim, as indicated by the findings of corpus searches presented in section 3, examples (22) below, but ‘try’ will turn out as an outlier.

<sup>4</sup> i. Geräte, die zu reparieren versucht wurden<sub>pl</sub> – devices that were attempted to (be) repair(ed)  
<https://www.annepost.at/2017/02/07/in-den-muell-mit-der-wegwerfgesellschaft/>

The following examples (7a-f) are from Cinque (2006: 65-68) and illustrate the construction in Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. It has not escaped French Grammarians such as Anscombe (1989:48), Brunot (1926:363), Grevisse and Goosse (2008:986), that the construction (7g) is used in French, as Lødrup (2022: 234) points out.

- (7) a. Los obreros están terminando de pintar estas paredes. (Spanish)  
       the workers are finishing to paint these walls  
       b. Estas paredes están siendo terminadas de pintar (por los obreros).  
           these walls are being finished to paint (by the workers)  
       c. As casas foram acabadas de construir em 1950. (Portuguese)  
           the houses were finished building in 1950  
       d. As casas foram começadas a construir em 1950.  
           the houses were begun to build in 1950  
       e. La casa fu finita di costruire il mese scorso. (Italian)  
           the house was finished to build the last month  
       f. Quelle case furono iniziate a costruire negli anni '20  
           those houses were started to build in-the years '20.  
       g. Mon article n' est pas fini de rédiger. (French)  
           my article NEG<sub>1</sub> is NEG<sub>2</sub> finished to edit  
           'I haven't finished editing my article.'

The grammar of English does not admit this kind of clause union construction (7), as the null occurrence in the *British National Corpus* (100 million) and the *Corpus of Contemporary American* (1 milliard) confirms. In British or American English, the object of an infinitival verb cannot be turned into the subject of a dominating clause, except for ECM-type constructions illustrated already by (1), which open a grammatically licit path leading from the object position of the infinitival verb to the local subject position and from there to the subject position of the superordinate finite clause.<sup>5</sup>

- (8) a.\*The walls were *begun* to paint.  
       b.\*The devices were *finished* to mend

The more extensive class of verbs as in German that admit a "long" passive is restricted to languages with verb clustering. These languages are either OV or free-word-order languages, that is Type-3-languages, such as the Slavic languages; see Haider & Szucsich (2022 a,b) for Slavic as Type-3, and Wurmbrand (2015a: 228) for long passive in Polish and BCS (Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian). As for OV languages other than German, long passive proper is noted sporadically, mainly because it is a rare phenomenon that tends to be overlooked or downgraded due to the outlier impression (see discussion below). Scandinavian languages grammatically behave like English with respect to 'true long' passive, but they dispose of a rich repertoire of

<sup>5</sup> Note that this subject-to-subject-path requirement in languages like English is the trigger of the mysterious appearance of 'to' in the passive of otherwise bare-infinitive complements of perception verbs:

i. They were seen \*(to) undergo huge restructurings.

The VP-spec position is no subject position in the technical sense (= the spec of a functional head). The functional head 'to' provides the necessary functional subject position for the subject-to-subject linking.

‘raising passive’<sup>6</sup>, as Engdahl (2022) discusses in great comparative detail. Lødrup (2022) focuses on corpus data mainly from Norwegian.

As for the “truly long” passive – the combination of passivized matrix verb and active infinitive – Lødrup (2014, 368), (2022) itemises *huske* (remember) and *forsette* (continue) in Norwegian. For Danish, Engdal (2022: 12, 28) names *huske* (*remember*), too, plus *ønske* (desire). Swedish grammar does not provide for the use of this construction, for principled reasons, as discussed below.

In view of this situation, the question naturally arises as to the relevant differences between the grammar of English (and similar languages) and the grammar of Romance languages, and eventually also of languages like German, that are responsible for the presence or exclusion of the so-called “truly long” passive construction in the particular languages. The answer has to differentiate between the restricted case of Romance and the more general case of German (and other OV languages). It will be demonstrated that the restrictive version of clause union seen in Romance languages is the maximum that can be achieved in [S[VO]] languages, but only when additional conditions are met, namely a reanalysis of the verbs as quasi-auxiliaries and a ‘low’ (= local to V°) position of the infinitive particle in the functional grid of a clause.

## 2. Analyses

“Clause union” is a metaphoric expression that needs to be grounded in structural terms. There are at least two mutually exclusive approaches. One possibility is the *derived-single-base* proposal. In such a view, clause union is the effect of re-structuring a fully clausal base-structure, as in Evers’ (1976) ‘*Tree Pruning*’ hypothesis, Aissen and Perlmutter’s (1976, 1983), “*Clause Reduction*” hypothesis (for Spanish), or Müller’s (2019) ‘*Structure Removal*’ idea for German. In such an approach, (9a) would be the result of structure reduction, applied to (9b) as the derivational base and starting point of (9a).

- (9) a. dass in Florenz Statuen zu errichten begonnen *wurden*  
       that in Florence statues to erect begun *were*  
       ‘that statues began to be erected in Florence’  
       b. dass in Florenz [PRO<sub>ARB</sub> Statuen zu errichten] begonnen *wurde*  
       that in Florence [PRO Statues to erect] begun was

Even if such an analysis could somehow be maintained in theory, it remains unconnected. First, there is no independent evidence for the technical tools that need to be invoked and second, if the theory offered such tools, any language could use “structure removal” or “clause reduction” in order to “prune” clause structures but this is not the empirical reality. A grammatical motive is missing. Why build up a structure and destroy it again? Finally, the proponents would have to refute the less demanding analysis according to which the ‘long-distance passive’ is an inevitable result of verbal-complex formation, as explicated in the following paragraphs.

The competing option is the *double-base, representational* analysis. In this view, there are alternative structural options for infinitival complementation in a clause. If this is true, the base structure of (9a) is different from (9b) from the beginning. In (9b), the infinitival construction

<sup>6</sup> This means that both, the matrix verb as well as the complement verb are passivized. This opens the independently motivated grammatical path from object to subject to matrix subject.

is a complement clause while in (9a) the infinitival complement is ‘smaller’ than a clause structure. The infinitival complement with ‘long passive’ cannot be extraposed (10a). Hence it is not sentential.

- (10) a. \*dass in Florenz begonnen wurden<sub>pl</sub>. [zahlreiche Statuen zu errichten]  
           that in Florence begun were numerous statues to erect  
       b. dass in Florenz begonnen wurde<sub>sg</sub>. [PRO zahlreiche Statuen zu errichten]  
           that in Florence begun were [numerous statues to erect]

The infinitival complement in clause-union constructions in OV languages such as German is not only non-sentential, it is truly small. In Haider (1986, (1991), and (2010: 309-313), clause-union infinitives are shown to structurally pattern with ‘raising’ verbs, which are *obligatorily* V-clustering, just like all auxiliaries and quasi-auxiliaries in German (and other OV languages).<sup>7</sup> The infinitival verb is part of the verb cluster of the given clause. Clusters can be fronted to the clause-initial position of V2-sentences (11a,b). (11c), on the other hand is deviant since ‘bereuen’ (repent) takes only a sentential complement. V-clusters cannot cross a clause boundary nor can a verbal head move out of its CP-domain.

- (11) a. [Zu beschützen gepflegt] hat man ihn nicht  
           [to protect used] has one him not    (‘It was not usual to protect him.’)  
       b. [Zu bauen begonnen] wurde der Turm noch nicht  
           to build begun was the tower<sub>Nom</sub> yet not  
       c. \*[Gebaut zu haben bereut] wurden<sub>pl</sub>. die Türme<sub>Nom-pl</sub>. nicht  
           [built to have repented] were the towers not (‘It was not repented to have built towers’)

An essential part of an empirically adequate account of the clause-union phenomenon is the handling of the (would-be) subject argument of the infinitival verbs of the standard construction. The question to be answered is this: What is the equivalent of the control relation in the mono-clausal structure if there is no structural space for a PRO-Subject in the structure of a simple finite clause as in (9a) or (2b)?

Let’s look back at (9a). Here, passive syntactically neutralizes the subject argument of ‘beginnen’(begin). The subject argument of ‘errichten’ (build, erect), which would be represented by PRO in the bi-sentential construction (9b), remains to be syntactically instantiated. How could the object of the infinitival verb become the subject of a clause in the presence of a primary subject candidate, namely PRO? The conclusion must be that syntactically there is no other candidate than the object argument of the infinitive verb, leaving it as the only candidate for the subject function. Here is a brief explication.

Verb-clusters count as *syntactically* complex V°-structures because the category of the cluster is V°. It is V° because verb-clusters are head-to-head-adjunction structures. The argument structure of the resulting V°-clusters is the unification of the argument structures of the individual verbs in the cluster. Technically, this is the result of *function composition*,<sup>8</sup> see Haider (1993: 273-278). Hinrichs & Nakayama (1994) implemented this idea within the HPSG framework.

<sup>7</sup> Clustering is the grammars’ solution of a problem: In OV, unlike in VO, cascades of V-projections would be recursively center-embedding left-branching structures (Haider 2010: 33). Clustering avoids such problems.

<sup>8</sup> *Function composition* is an operation  $\circ$  that takes two functions  $f$  and  $g$ , and produces a function  $h = g \circ f$  such that  $h(x) = g(f(x))$ . The compound function is applied to the arguments. In a two-verb cluster,  $f$  and  $g$  are the



Here is an example. (12a) is the verb cluster of the active version of (9a). It consists of two transitive verbs; one being selected by the other. The individual argument grids are given in (12b). (12c) is the *infinitival* form of the verb as a *particle verb* with the infinitive particle ‘zu’ (to). ‘Zu’ acts as a blocker of the subject candidate.<sup>9</sup> (12d) illustrates the effect of functional composition: The argument structure of ‘errichten’ replaces the object argument of ‘begin’. (12e) is the resulting argument structure of the cluster (12a). The object of the infinitive is the only argument provided in the argument structure of the cluster.

- (12) a. [[zu errichten]<sub>V°</sub> beginnen<sub>V°</sub>]<sub>V°</sub>  
to erect /build begin  
b. errichten: <A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub>>, beginnen <B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>>,  
c. zu errichten: <[A<sub>1</sub>], A<sub>2</sub>>  
d. zu errichten beginnen: <[A<sub>1</sub>], A<sub>2</sub>> & <B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>> → <B<sub>1</sub>, <[A<sub>1</sub>], A<sub>2</sub>>> →  
e. argument grid of the V°-cluster: <B<sub>1</sub> = [A<sub>1</sub>], A<sub>2</sub>>

Now, let's convert (12a) into a passive construction. All we have to do is to add the passive auxiliary 'werden' (be, become) to the cluster which makes 'beginnen' (begin) change into the participial form. The result is a three-verb cluster (13a). Passivizing 'werden', as an auxiliary, does not contribute any argument. It merely governs the participial form of the selected head, and the participial form is a blocker of a subject candidate in the grid. The result is (13b), with the object of 'bauen (build, erect) as the only available syntactical argument, instantiated in (13c).

- (13) a. [[[zu bauen]<sub>V°</sub> begonnen<sub>V°-PII</sub>]<sub>V°</sub> werden]<sub>V°</sub>  
           to build        begun                    be  
       b. [zu bauen begonnen werden]<sub>V°</sub>: <[B<sub>1</sub> = [A<sub>1</sub>]], A<sub>2</sub>>  
       c. dass etwas zu bauen begonnen wurden  
           that something to build begun were

The only syntactically accessible argument in the argument grid (13b) is the direct-object argument of ‘bauen (build) and it ends up with nominative in a finite clause as a result of the application of the standard case assignment principles. The nominative agrees with the finite version of ‘werden’ in (13c). In principle, there is no limit to forming infinitival clusters, except for limitations of the working memory capacities. In the appendix, intrepid readers are invited to practise the step-by-step function composition of a 5-verb cluster.

- (14) (dass die Texte) [zu übersetzen zu versuchen begonnen wurden]  
(that the texts) [to translate to try begun were  
'that the texts were begun to be tried to be translated'

Note that *function composition* is the technical implementation of the argument-structure amalgamation mechanism in clustering, and it solves the problem of the equivalent of PRO in the clause-union construction. There is no syntactically active argument of the infinitival verb(s) in

functions provided by each one of the verbs and  $h$  is the compound function of the cluster. Technically, these functions are Lambda-calculus expressions.

<sup>9</sup> This is easy to demonstrate with minimal pairs such as (i) and (ii), with the passive effect in (ii).

i. Verkaufen! – Sell!

ii. Zu verkaufen! – to sell ('To be sold') [cf. To let!]

iii. Das ist zu tun. – this is to do (= ‘This is to be done’)

[see Haider (1984)]

a cluster that would require a syntactic representative. The argument position is directly saturated by the subject of the superordinate verb. Crucially, it is not an implicit argument. It is satisfied by functional application as the typical form of argument saturation.

A different execution of the idea that clause union predicates are ‘smaller’ than a full clause structure has been proposed by Wurmbrand (2001). Depending on the particular verb classes, clause union predicates are treated as VPs, vPs, or TPs. For a detailed assessment of this hypothesis and the associated weaknesses, see Reis & Sternefeld (2004) and Haider (2003: 93-94); (2010: 333-335).

A principled deficiency<sup>10</sup> of the multiple-subcategorisation approach is the fact that it cannot capture the syntactic properties that result from the fact that the infinitival verbs of clause-union form a V-cluster. As a head-to-head adjunction structure, it does not tolerate interveners (except for particles of particles verbs, which are heads, too). Stacked VPs, vPs, or TPs, however, would provide targets for extraposition at their respective right boundaries, but clause-union structures are compact. There is no room for non-verbal interveners, as illustrated in (15b,c).

- (15) a. *Die Täter müssen<sub>pl</sub> [abzulenken versucht werden]<sub>VC</sub> von ihrem Plan*  
           the perpetrators must [off-to-draw tried be] from their plan  
           ‘it is necessary to distract the perpetrators from their plan’  
       b. \**Die Täter müssen<sub>pl</sub> [abzulenken versucht von ihrem Plan werden]<sub>VC</sub>*  
       c. \**Die Täter müssen<sub>pl</sub> [abzulenken von ihrem Plan versucht werden]<sub>VC</sub>*  
       d. *Die Täter müssen<sub>pl</sub> [abzulenken versucht werden]<sub>VC</sub> von ihrem Plan<sup>11</sup>*  
       e. [*Versucht werden*]<sub>VC</sub> muss<sub>sg</sub> [*PRO die Täter abzulenken von ihrem Plan*]<sub>Inf.-clause</sub>

As shown in (16), each of the detached projections of the verbs of the otherwise clustering verbs, which is enforced by placing them in the sentence-initial spec position of a V2 sentence, provides an extraposition option:

- (16) a. [*Abzulenken von ihrem Plan*] müssen die Täter versucht werden.  
           distracted from their plan      must    the perpetrators tried be  
       b. [*Abzulenken versucht von ihrem Plan*] müssen die Täter werden.  
       c. [*Abzulenken versucht werden von ihrem Plan*] müssen die Täter.

In (16), each topicalised phrase is a licit V-projection plus an extraposed PP. In Haider (2010: 206-207), it is explicated how the ‘trace’ of the *phrases* in the clause initial position fits into a cluster consisting of X<sup>o</sup> elements.

### 3. Facts

Firstly, two introductory paragraphs: “Truly long” passive is a construction that has not yet been sufficiently broadly and comparatively surveyed. It is rare, mainly because of its grammatical complexity, and for those who see ease of processing as a primary sign of grammaticality, it is marginal, precisely because it is less easy to process than variants in standard passive.

<sup>10</sup> Dealing with PRO, for which there is no place in vPs and VPs, is another principled and recalcitrant deficit.

<sup>11</sup> Infinitival complements of ‘versuchen’ and other alternatively clustering verbs figure also in another construction, namely the so-called *third construction*, see Den Besten & Rutten (1989), Wöllstein-Leisten (2001) and Haider (2010: 284-286): ?*Die Täter<sub>pl</sub> müssen<sub>pl</sub> [versucht werden --]<sub>VC</sub> [von ihrem Plan abzulenken]<sub>extraposed</sub>*



Höhle's (1978: 177) overconcerned warning turns out as overstated for German.<sup>12</sup> He, who has been the first to analyse this form of passivization in German, notes: "*In fact, 'versuchen' [try]<sub>HH</sub> is the only verb that allows passives of this kind.*" In a footnote, he adds that "*when consciously constructing such cases [with other verbs]<sub>HH</sub>, one would succumb to autosuggestion*".

Today, we know it better. With access to electronic corpora, his judgment would have been worded less apodictically. Let me repeat that the very construction is attested for a variety of verbs, including *auftragen* (order), *beabsichtigen* (intend), *beginnen* (begin), *erlauben* (permit), *gestatten* (grant), *untersagen* (forbid), *(vergessen* (forget), *vernachlässigen* (neglect), *verweigern* (refuse), *versäumen* (fail, miss), *versuchen* (try), *wagen* (dare), and many more.

As for Dutch, the academic opinion on long-passive seems to be cautious, too. It tends to be marginalised. Fortunately, corpora search is easy and rewarding. The construction is documented by the dozens. Eventually, Kovač & Schoenmakers (2022) have started to put the issue on an experimental basis.<sup>13</sup> Here are some corpus finds (17a-d).

- (17) a. Deze dromen werden [*geprobeerd* te ontcijferen].<sup>14</sup>  
       these dreams were tried to decipher
- b. (dat) een verkorte versie [*kan worden gepland* te starten]<sup>15</sup>  
       an abbreviated version can be scheduled to start
- c. ondanks dat de vooraf bestelde bruschetta's [*werden vergeten* te serveren]<sup>16</sup>  
       despite that the pre-ordered bruschettas were forgotten to serve
- d. dat de "vergeten" kinderen niet [*worden vergeten* te vragen]<sup>17</sup>  
       that the "forgotten" children not are forgotten to ask

Let's take a look now at the currently still very patchy cross-linguistic situation just for a rough orientation. What we are dealing with is a construction in which the subject of a passivised finite clause is the direct object argument not of the passivised main verb but of a dependent (infinitival) verb which is *not* passivised. Table 1 is an outline of the comparative situation in languages for which corresponding data could be obtained.

**Table 1:** 'Long' passive proper in infinitival constructions (in VO vs. OV languages)

Verbs / Languages	English	Norw./Dan.	Romance	German	Dutch	Japanese	Kannada
<i>begin, stop, continue</i>	*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>try (as outlier in VO)</i>	#	#	*	✓	✓	n.d.a.	n.d.a.
subset of control verbs	*	✓/*	*	✓	✓	✓	n.d.a.

[# = considered ungrammatical, but in use]; "n.d.a." = no data available at present]

<sup>12</sup> What he couldn't know at the time, however, is that in some VO languages, this verb is a non-aspectual verb in use with a long passive; see Norwegian and Danish: <https://ntnuopen.ntnu.no/ntnu-xmlui/handle/11250/3074104>

i. *spørsmålet som forsøkes å besvare* [question<sub>def</sub> that tried-is to answer – 'the question being tried to answer']

<sup>13</sup> Judgement experiment with 80 native speakers of Dutch. It is judged marginal but not rejected. In my opinion, judgement studies need to be complemented with *elicitation-by-cloze* studies, in which the tested persons have to fix the form of the finite verb or, in languages with morphological case, to select the case of (the article of) the DP in question. For cloze tests, it is usually less disruptive if test subjects are guided by schooling norms.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bedrock.nl/dromen-hersenen/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://cdn.akeebabackup.com/downloads/documentation/localised/dutch/admin-tools-nl.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.tripadvisor.be/ShowUserReviews-g652308-d4927025-r596963525-Isola\\_Bella-De\\_Koog\\_Texel\\_North\\_Holland\\_Province.html](https://www.tripadvisor.be/ShowUserReviews-g652308-d4927025-r596963525-Isola_Bella-De_Koog_Texel_North_Holland_Province.html)

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nicoline-den-ouden-9ba9a4147\\_leeftijdsgrens-van-18-moet-afgeschaft-worden-activity-7023716320261103616-ARy4](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nicoline-den-ouden-9ba9a4147_leeftijdsgrens-van-18-moet-afgeschaft-worden-activity-7023716320261103616-ARy4)

Structurally, long passive varies with the clause-structure type of the given language. In head-*initial* languages like English, any subject – in active or passive constructions – is in, or related to, a structural subject position (18a), headed by a functional category. In OV languages, on the other hand, verb clustering is the source of long passive. In languages with head-final VPs, there is no obligatory functional subject position. Object-to-Subject is the result of Acc-to-Nom in-situ.<sup>18</sup>

- (18) a. [ $\text{DP}_i$  [ $\text{VP}$  V-*fin-PASS* [ $\text{VP}$  V-*Inf* --i]]] (S)VO  
 b. [ $\text{VP}$ ...  $\text{DP}_{\text{Acc} \rightarrow \text{NOM}}$  ... [ $\text{VC}$  V-*Inf* V-*fin-PASS* ]V°] (S)OV

In Romance languages (in particular Italian, French, Portuguese, and Spanish) – according to Cinque (2006: 66, 67) and the literature cited there – long passive as sketched in (18a), is limited to a very small class of governing verbs, namely, in the case of Italian, to *continuare* (continue), *finire*, (stop) and *iniziare/cominciare* (begin) plus, in very restricted contexts, also *mandare* (send) and *passare* (pass). Crucially, the wider range of control verbs amenable to long passive in OV languages such as German, is ruled out in these languages.

- (19) a. Quelle case furono *iniziate* a costruire negli anni ‘20. Italian  
 those houses were *started* to build in the ‘20s  
 b. La casa fu *finita* di costruire il mese scorso.  
 the house was *finished* to build the last month.

The Germanic VO languages, if the available literature is correct, only allow the subject-subject raising construction, with the exception of Norwegian and Danish. These two language appears to be the only Germanic VO language that not only admits the subject-to-subject-raising construction with a passivized matrix verb and a passivized infinitive but also a real long passive, with aspectual verbs (begin, finish) and with two control verbs (*huske* – remember, *ønske* – desire). The examples in (20) are taken from Lødrup (2022: 226).

- (20) a. den gamle versjonen, som ble *fortsatt* å produsere Norwegian  
 the old version.<sub>DEF</sub> that became *continued* to produce  
 'the old versions that are continued to be produced'  
 b. hva som må *huskes* å ta med  
 what that must *remember*.<sub>INF.PASS</sub> to take with  
 'that what must be remembered to be brought'

Let us turn now to ‘try’, THE outlier in all these VO languages. In news corpora on the web, as for instance the 15 milliards<sup>+</sup> NOW corpus of *web news* from 20 countries, no ‘long’ passive could be found with the verb *begin*, but many with *try*. (21) lists examples that add up to dozens. Many showed up in media from multi-lingual countries with a dominant SOV language (aka World Englishes), some are from scientific papers with authors native in an SOV language.

- (21) a. We have been tried to inform.<sup>19</sup> [source from Sri Lanka]  
 b. The witnesses *were tried to contact*. [source: *Pakistan Today*]  
 c. There are a few questions [that *were tried to address*].<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Detailed justifications of these assumptions are provided in Haider (2010), (2015) and other work of Haider’s.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.top-rated.online/cities/Iriyawetiya/place/p/13803856/Salon+A9+-+Kiribathgoda>

<sup>20</sup> <https://egusphere.copernicus.org/preprints/2024/egusphere-2024-40/egusphere-2024-40-AC3-supplement.pdf>

- d. information about the attacks [that *were tried to perform* on this project]<sup>21</sup>
- e. Butanol has been tried to remove during fermentation by many techniques (*Wikipedia*)<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, ‘*provare*’ (try) as main verb in a long-passive infinitive construction is no hapax legomenon in Italian either, but an outlier, too. Cinque (2006: 67) starts his examples with a long passive triggered by the passivization of *cercare* (try) or *provare* (try).

- (22) a. nel presente studio *sono<sub>pl.</sub> stati provati ad utilizzare* degli stimoli neutri<sub>pl.</sub><sup>23</sup>  
           in-the present study have been tried to use neutral stimuli<sup>24</sup>
- b. un balzello che già fu *provato* ad inserire in bolletta<sup>25</sup>  
           a levy that already was *tried* to include in bill‘  
           ‘a levy that was already tried to be included in the bill’
- c. tutti i sintomi mi sono stati provati ad indurre sotto ipnosi<sup>26</sup>  
           all the symptoms (to) me were tried to induce under hypnosis

The grammatical status of the long passive of ‘*try*’ in English and other VO languages is “*ungrammatical*”. Its usage betrays grammar deficits in English (presumably as L2) when confronted with transfer effects from an OV L1. The attempt to grammatically avoid such calamities is equally unfortunate. The instances of an ungrammatical long-distance passive of *try* as in (21) are by far outnumbered by a last-resort construction that uses an existing grammatical derivation that is, however, inadmissible for this verb, namely (23a-c). The independently existing and ‘illegally’ pirated derivation is the ECM-construction with each of the two main verbs passivised, but ‘*try*’ is no ECM-verb. This usage is not completely restricted to the verb ‘*try*’, as (23d) illustrates.

- (23) a. [The program<sub>i</sub> *has been tried* [--<sub>i</sub> to be evaluated --<sub>i</sub>]] (CocA corpus)<sup>27</sup>
- b. Value concepts *have been tried to be* given by means of the songs<sup>28</sup>
- c. It is the voice that *has been tried to be* silenced.<sup>29</sup>
- d. We *have been failed to be notified*.<sup>30</sup>

A grammatical illusion – see Haider (2011), Phillips et. al. (2011) – is a case of *acceptable ungrammaticality* (Frazier 1985). A minor grammatical offense is accepted in order to avoid a major offense. The minor offense is the handling of passivised *try* (or ‘fail’) like a verb with an ECM-complement, that is, a complement smaller than a CP. Then, long-distance movement of the object argument, which is turned into a subject by passivizing the infinitival verb, ‘moves’ it to the matrix subject position via the embedded subject position. This part of the derivation is fully well-formed. The minor offense is the subcategorization violation of ‘*try*’ (or ‘fail’) as a verb with an infinitival ECM complement.

<sup>21</sup> <https://docs.vmware.com/en/VMware-Tanzu-Service-Mesh/services/tanzu-service-mesh-enterprise/GUID-77C053E3-38B4-418C-AEDA-71CBA69B52A7.html>

<sup>22</sup> ChatGPT identifies it as ungrammatical.

<sup>23</sup> <https://thesis.unipd.it/retrieve/f85456ed-6e68-4da6-a0ac-939e77bdc8da/TESI%20LUDOVICA%20BRAGATO.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Note that here, the focused subject is in the postverbal position, identifiable by agreement.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ilmediano.com/deposito-cauzionale-gori-il-nuovo-balzello-nascosto-nella-bolletta-dellacqua-per-fare-cassa-sulle-spalle-degli-utenti/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.medicitalia.it/consulti/psicologia/981969-come-sapere-se-la-diagnosi-di-morbo-di-chron-e-corretta-dopo-aver-subito-per-anni-ipnosi.html>

<sup>27</sup> Many more examples, prefixed with a warning sign, can be inspected on the following site:

<https://www.linguee.de/englisch-deutsch/uebersetzung/has+been+tried.html>.

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271025035\\_The\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_songs\\_in\\_primary\\_school\\_music\\_course\\_books\\_in\\_terms\\_of\\_the\\_containing\\_values](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271025035_The_analysis_of_the_songs_in_primary_school_music_course_books_in_terms_of_the_containing_values)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.deine-korrespondentin.de/a-big-girl/>

<sup>30</sup> United States. Congress. House. Committee on Small Business. Subcommittee on SBA Oversight and Minority Enterprise · 1976

But what is going on in the cases under (21a-e)? These specimens are ungrammatical in British and American English but nevertheless in use in World Englishes. Again, there seems to be an overgeneralization involved, invited by the existence of the construction exemplified by (24a-c). A search for “*It has been tried to*”, produced 6.090 hits.

- (24) a. It has been tried [CP[TP to alleviate the problem]].  
 b. It has been tried [CP[TP to find additional support]].  
 c. It has been tried [CP[TP to fill a gap in the scientific literature]].

If in (24), the non-branching CP-node is disregarded, the direct object, as the only lexically present argument becomes an accessible candidate for a syntactic subject. Nevertheless, sentences such as (25) are ill-formed in American and British English. (24) does not deserve an account. It is grammatically bad English. The examples on the Internet are examples of a negative transfer from an SOV L1 into L2 English.

- (25) (\*) The problem has been tried to *overcome*<sup>31</sup>

Syntactically, the deviance is easy to identify. The grammatical defect lies in the disregard of the subject argument of the verb “overcome”. If ‘the problem’ as the derived subject were able to relate to the object of overcome indeed, there could be no CP boundary in between ‘try’ and ‘overcome’. But, if there is no CP boundary, there is no adequate structural space for PRO as the subject of ‘overcome’ and if there is no PRO subject, the subject-candidate of ‘overcome’ is unassigned, that is, omitted. This is ungrammatical. (25) may sound acceptable, but only to the ear of an L2 writer whose L1 is an OV language (e.g. German, Hindi, Japanese, ...) or a T3 language (e.g. Slavic). The ‘Try-Problem’ is not a grammatical problem, but a sign of a grammar competence that differs from the standard English grammar.

Next, we turn to the languages on the right side of Table 1, namely the OV languages. They are representative of the opposite side of the spectrum of the phenomenology of ‘long’ passive. VO languages like English do not provide any syntactical ‘headroom’ for long passive, if we disregard the odd ball ‘try’, with passive on each of the two main verbs (23). Other VO languages are limited to the few verbs that can be reanalysed as quasi-auxiliary verbs, which English doesn’t.

On the other side of the grammatical spectrum, there are the OV languages with their head-clustering options in the form of V-clusters. Clustering feeds clause-union constructions that underly ‘long’ passive for control verbs. Therefore, OV languages are expected to admit long passive proper for a subset of control verbs, but the documentation is extremely patchy and typically located in footnotes. Fukuda (2007) concentrates on aspectual verbs. Akuzawa (2015: 59, Fn.11) notes: “The verb “-wasurer” (*forget to*) is categorized as a long passivizable verb in Kageyama (1993). Indeed, we find examples like the following [26]<sub>HH</sub>, (see Kishimoto 2013)”. Kashmiri is an SOV language, too, and genuine long-distance passive with infinitival complements is reported to exist (Chandra 2007:104). Their examples are repeated as (26a) and (26b).

- (26) a. Kasa-ga *oki* -wasurer -rare -ta. Japanese  
 umbrella-NOM *put* -forget -PASS-PST  
 ‘An umbrella was forgot to put.’

<sup>31</sup> p. 661, in N. Murata (ed.) Research in Photosynthesis, vol. 2. Kluwer Acad. Publishers. (three German authors)

- b. jaani zAriyi aayi TrakTar Thiik *karmic kuushish karnI*. Kashmiri  
 John.abl by came.fem.sg. tractor *right do.fem. try do-inf*.  
 ‘The tractor was tried to (be) repair(ed) by John.’

There is still another type of languages whose clause structuring facilitates a ‘long’ passive variant, namely Type-3 languages such as Slavic languages; see Haider & Szucsich (2022a: 22-24). In these languages, the word order freedom opens the possibility that verbs may be optionally clustered. Here (27) are examples from BCS [Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian].

- (27) a. Zasigurno su se probale zataškavati neke stvari<sup>32</sup> BCS  
 certainly are SE tried to sort-out certain things  
 ‘Certainly, certain things must have been tried to be sorted out’  
 b. Ti glasači su se *probali obmanuti*. Wurmbrand (2015b)  
 those voters.MASC.NOM are SE tried.PL.MASC trick.INF  
 ‘Those voters were tried to be tricked’  
 c. Te melodije su se probale odsvirati Wurmbrand (2015a)  
 those melodies<sub>Nom</sub> are SE tried<sub>Pl</sub>. play<sub>Inf</sub>.

It is now time to briefly recapitulate the essentials of this section. ‘Long’ passive is a grammatical epiphenomenon. It is the ‘free-ride’ variant in which a lexical verb is treated like an auxiliary (see Romance), or as part of a verb cluster (OV languages). In each case, it does not project in a clause-structure of its own. If such a verb is passivised, it triggers object-to-subject promotion.

Up until now, in the literature, the grammaticality assessment of L1 data by professional syntacticians has to a certain extent been characterised by an attitude of infallibility. Some syntacticians are apparently totally sure and convinced to be able to judge *every* construction of their native language as grammatical or not – although this has been empirically proven wrong.<sup>33</sup> Misjudgements are quite common for complex or rare data. Moreover, grammars are no nationwide effective law systems. They come in regional or sociolectal variants, which, by the way, is a driving moment in diachronic grammar change (that is hampered by normative schooling and writing). Nowadays, corpora or at least large language samples on the internet can be used in conjunction with effective search techniques to cross-check whether a syntactician's judgment is biased and misleading. “Truly long” passive is a worthwhile case in point.

#### 4. What explains the facts

Passive in Nom-Acc languages (as well as anti-passive in Erg-Abs languages, which is not discussed here) is a grammar's response to the universal grammatical property that, unlike objects, subjects cannot be spontaneously omitted. Their elimination must be grammatically signaled. Cross-linguistically, two devices are frequently used, namely *affixation* of the main verb or by means of combining a verb form that blocks the subject argument with an auxiliary that does not deblock it again. This is “passive” and it is a local-domain phenomenon.

<sup>32</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story\\_fbid=3629672613803921&id=162926690478548](https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story_fbid=3629672613803921&id=162926690478548)

<sup>33</sup> In a survey on superiority in Dutch, 22 *native syntacticians* had to introspectively judge 10 Dutch wh-clauses 7 of which have been declared as ungrammatical in the literature. The results did not match: Each one of the 10 sentences is acceptable for 36% up to 100% of the interviewed syntacticians No sentence is rejected by more than 74%. 55% do not reject the allegedly ungrammatical sentences at all; see Haider (2009: 79).

The impression of ‘long’ passive, that is, as a syntactically non-local phenomenon, is misleading. It is the mistaken view that in each case of infinitival complementation, the passive version of the respective constructions would be derived from an embedded infinitival clause. The empirically adequate explanation is much simpler. What appears to be a ‘long’ passive is alternation of the lexical status or its subcategorisation information in combination with a ‘free ride’ on grammatically available paths.

In the highly restricted Romance variety, lexical reanalysis produces a small set of quasi-auxiliaries, derived from lexical verbs that otherwise select a clausal complement. The reanalysis is invited by the fact that the respective verbs have a “raising” variant:

- (26) a. *He intentionally began/continued/stopped to violate the rules.*  
 b. *It (#intentionally) began/continued/stopped to rain*

The reanalysis that is necessary for the Romance variety is possible only in languages in which the infinitive particle can be regarded virtually like a particle of a particle verb. In English, however, 'to' is a functional head that heads a functional tense projection too high up in the functional grid of a clause. So, the reanalysis of a verb's complementation requirement would not find the necessary structural context for becoming operative.

Let us briefly contemplate the purely auxiliary version of the very auxiliary construction that in Italian is ‘hijacked’ as a possible construction by the verbs in (26). It shows that an infinitive particle in Italian operates in a parallel fashion in Italian (27a) and German (27b). The particle blocks the would-be subject argument (27a). ‘*Be*’-type auxiliaries do not change the blockage (28a) while ‘*have*’-type auxiliaries unlock it (28b). It is this construction where the interplay between the auxiliary and the infinitive particle is most obvious since there is just an infinitival verb with a particle and an auxiliary.

- (27) a. [Ogni argomento *da capire*]<sub>DP</sub> è come [la strada *da seguire*]<sub>DP</sub>  
 each argument *to understand* is like the road *to follow*.  
 ‘Each topic to be understood is like the road to be followed’.
- b. [Jedes *zu verstehende* Argument]<sup>34</sup> ist [ein *zu folgender* Weg].  
 every to understand<sub>Agr</sub> argument is a to pursue way<sub>Agr</sub>
- (28) a. Tutta la materia [*è da rispettare*]  
 every the matter is to respect (‘... is to be respected’)
- b. *Hanno da rispettare* tutta la materia  
 (we) have to respect whole the matter
- c. Tutta la materia [*ha da essere* rispettata].  
 whole the matter *has to be* respected

There is an immediate parallel between Italian and German not only between (27a) and (27b), but also between (28a-c) and (29a-c), respectively. The passive effect comes from the combination of a grammatical argument blocker and an auxiliary that does not deblock, see (28a) and (29a). The grammatical mechanism is identical although the triggering auxiliaries '*avere*' and '*haben*' are no cognates. There is no common historical past for these constructions. They

<sup>34</sup> In the Italian-to-German translation, the Google translator correctly proposes this version while DeepL suggested a relative clause – “*Argument, das es zu verstehen gilt*” – which is also a perfect translation.



evolved independently. The lock & key mechanism, which is identical for *have/be* plus infinitive and for *have/be* plus participle (aka passive), is described first in Haider (1984).

- (29) a. Die ganze Materie *ist zu* respektieren.  
the whole matter is to respect ('... is to be respected')
- b. Wir *haben* die ganze Materie *zu* respektieren.  
we have the whole matter to respect
- c. Die ganze Materie *hat* respektiert *zu werden*.  
the whole matter *has* respected *to be*

Deblocking is a local interaction, as the contrast between (28b) and (29b) on the one hand and (28c) and (29c) on the other hand illustrate. In the latter case, the deblocking effect of the *have*-type auxiliary is void since it does not select the *da*-infinitive but only the auxiliary ‘*essere*’.

We have now reached the point where we need to make sure that the proposed analysis is the empirically and theoretically preferable one. A simple test is to hypothetically reverse the result. Could Italian be handled like German and German like Italian? In other words: Is the availability of the long passive for each of the two verb groups a randomly distributed grammatical property? The answer is clearly negative:

First, the Italian version is based on the re-analysis of aspectual verbs as quasi auxiliaries. This would be possible in German too. But the entire German class of verbs cannot be treated in the Italian way. Here, long passive is an effect of verb-clustering, which is absent in VO languages of the Romance and Germanic family. The re-analysis of a control verb as a quasi-auxiliary verb is restricted to verbs whose argument structure allows semantically empty subjects. Here is an Italian and a German example:

- (30) a. Ha intenzionalmente iniziato a cantare mentre iniziava a piovere. Italiano  
       (s/he) has intentionally began to sing while (it) began to rain  
       b. Sie hörte absichtlich auf zu singen als es zu regnen aufhörte . Deutsch  
       she stopped intentionally to sing when it stopped to rain

Evidently, these aspectual verbs have a semantically variable argument grid. On the one hand, they can be interpreted as agentive verbs; on the other hand, they are compatible with a semantically empty subject argument, as known from weather verbs, even in the sentential infinitival construction with subject control.

A different kind of reanalysis but also one which concerns lexically specified properties of a verb we see with control verbs that alternatively turn into verbs that can be integrated in a verbal cluster. The prototypical clustering verbs are auxiliary verbs and quasi-auxiliaries like causatives (e.g. *lassen* = let, make) or epistemic quasi-auxiliaries like *scheinen* (seem). In German, there is even a modal, viz. *brauchen* (need), that selects an infinitival verb with *zu* (to) in the cluster.

In a sense, the clustering option is the construction mode of auxiliaries. In Italian and in German, with the means and within the limits of the respective grammars, there are verbs that are alternatively treated to a limited extent in a structural way that is the only possible way for auxiliary verbs. A kind of “auxiliarisation” is what ‘long’ passive in German has in common with ‘long’ passive in Italian. This limits Italian to verbs that fit into the aspectual grid of the

sentence structure. In Cinque's (2006) wording they are treated as functional heads. This is no viable option for other control verbs.

In German, in the simplest case, that is, a subject control verb with an infinitival clause as direct object, the structural difference between the bi-clausal and the clustering mono-clausal construction is only in the eye of the syntactic beholder. It is semantically and syntactically neutral in simple cases such as (31).

- (31) a. dass sie<sup>i</sup> [PRO<sup>i</sup> ihn zu loben] versäumte  
           that she [him to praise] failed  
       b. dass sie ihn [zu loben versäumte]<sub>VC</sub>

The control verbs that are optionally used in the clustering variant typically are subject control verbs that select an infinitival clause as direct object in the clausal complement construction, but the property is attested and acceptable even with ditransitive dative-control verbs, as in (32):

- (32) gewisse Ecken, die ihm nicht [zu besichtigen erlaubt wurden]<sup>35</sup>  
       certain corners which him<sub>Dat</sub> not [to visit allowed were]

The amalgamation of the argument structure, in the course of which the subject argument of the infinitival verb is unified with the control argument does not require subject-to-subject matching. In (32), the would-be-subject argument of *besichtigen* (visit) is unified with the indirect-object argument of *erlauben* (allow).

Now we are finally ready to ask ourselves where the grammatical differences come from. What makes Romance, Danish and Norwegian special compared to English or Swedish in the areas under discussion? What is minimally necessary for the availability of the “truly long” passive within the class of infinitive-selecting verbs that have an impersonal variant. The simple answer is this. It is the status of the infinitival marker and its relation to the verb marked as infinitival verb.

The latter requirement eliminates English. There is no selection-relation to an infinitival form because English is the only Germanic language without morphological infinitive (33c-d). Only the imperative (33a) is unmarked in all Germanic languages.

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| (33) <i>Danish</i> (as representative) | <i>English</i>                |
| a. Syng!                               | <i>Sing!</i>                  |
| b. De synger.                          | They <i>sing</i> .            |
| c. Han kan synge.                      | He can <i>sing</i> .          |
| d. invitationen til at synge           | the invitation to <i>sing</i> |

The Scandinavian and the Romance grammars define morphologically marked infinitive forms. So, they all meet one of the requirements. The second requirement, viz. a local head-head selection relation is the dividing line for Swedish. As Christensen (2005: 151, 155) argues on the basis of distribution data, the Swedish infinitival particle “*att*” is a higher functional head while the Danish “*at*” and the Norwegian “*å*” is a lower functional marker of an infinitival (phrase). The same is true for Italian “*di*”, as Moscati & Rizzi (2021: 2) show, and presumably also for Spanish “*de*” and “*a*”.

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.google.at/books/edition/Erinnerungen\\_cines\\_Deutschen/xCreEAAQBAJ?hl=de&gbpv=1&dq=%22zu+besichtigen+++erlaubt+wurden%22&pg=PA380&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.at/books/edition/Erinnerungen_cines_Deutschen/xCreEAAQBAJ?hl=de&gbpv=1&dq=%22zu+besichtigen+++erlaubt+wurden%22&pg=PA380&printsec=frontcover)

In sum, the Romance and Danish-Norwegian minimal access to “truly long” passive rests on the *local* relation of the selecting verb and the dependent infinitival verb phrase headed by an infinitive particle. English ‘to’ and Swedish ‘att’ is too high up in the functional architecture of a clause.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. Summary

In OV languages as well as in T3 languages, cluster formation is the stepping stone to the long passive variant of a subset of passivized control verbs. Structurally, they are handled like quasi-auxiliaries such as the obligatorily clustering counterparts of (English) raising verbs in OV languages.

In VO languages, a small class of control verbs, namely those with a semantically optionally specified subject argument slot, are treated as quasi-auxiliaries in an extended V-projection as long as a local relation can be established between the ‘fake’ quasi-auxiliary and the selected infinitive marker can be established. This presupposes the infinitive marker is sufficiently low in the phrasal architecture of the given language. In English and Swedish, for instance it is too high,

A cross-linguistic oddity is the frequently found long passive of the verb ‘try’ and its verbal paraphrases in SVO languages. These verbs apparently trigger a grammatical illusion, i.e. a construction of “acceptable ungrammaticality.” In OV languages, however, long passives of these verbs are unspectacular cases of passivised V-clusters.

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<sup>36</sup> Swedish and Danish have developed another grammatical object-to-subject mechanism that solves the object-to-subject challenge for infinitives by using a participial form., which is known to block the subject argument:  
*i. Arbetidene ventes avsluttet innen 8. august.* Faarlund et al. (1997: 850) &  
 works.DEF expect.PAS finished.PCP.SG.NEUT before 8 August Engdahl (2022: 14)  
 ‘The works are expected to be finished before August 8.’

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## Appendix

**The composed argument structure of [zu übersetzen zu versuchen begonnen werden]<sub>VC</sub>**  
to translate to try begun be  
‘to be begun to try to translate

The capital letters stand for the arguments of the respective verbs. The underlined argument is the “designated argument”, that is, the candidate for the syntactic subject function. The three lexical verbs are transitive verbs. ‘Versuchen’ (try) and ‘beginnen’ (begin) select an infinitival, either as head of an infinitival clause or as governed form in the verbal cluster.

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| a. zu <b>übersetzen</b> :                              | $\langle [\underline{Ü}_1], \underline{Ü}_2 \rangle$  | subject candidate blocked by ‚zu‘ (to)              |
| b. zu <b>versuchen</b> :                               | $\langle [\underline{V}_1], \underline{V}_2 \rangle$  | subject candidate blocked by ‚zu‘ (to)              |
| c. <b>begonnen</b> :                                   | $\langle [\underline{B}_1], \underline{B}_2 \rangle$  | subject candidate blocked by the participial format |
| d. <b>werden</b> :                                     | $\langle \rangle$   | empty argument format of the auxiliary              |
|  |   |   |
| e. zu übersetzen zu <b>versuchen</b> :                 | $\langle [\underline{V}_1], \langle [\underline{Ü}_1], \underline{Ü}_2 \rangle \rangle \rightarrow \langle [\underline{V}_1] = [\underline{Ü}_1], \underline{Ü}_2 \rangle$  |   |
| f. zu übersetzen zu versuchen <b>begonnen</b> :        | $\langle [\underline{B}_1], \langle [\underline{V}_1] = [\underline{Ü}_1], \underline{Ü}_2 \rangle \rangle \rightarrow$<br>$\langle [\underline{B}_1] = [\underline{V}_1] = [\underline{Ü}_1], \underline{Ü}_2 \rangle$ |   |
| g. zu übersetzen zu versuchen <b>begonnen werden</b> : | $\langle \langle [\underline{B}_1] = [\underline{V}_1] = [\underline{Ü}_1], \underline{Ü}_2 \rangle \rangle$  |   |

The incremental function composition of the argument structures of the verbs involved produces (g) as the argument structure of the cluster, consisting of a blocked subject argument and a direct object argument. This surfaces as nominative, according to the rules of case management in a finite clause.

- h. Der Satz<sub>Nom</sub> wird<sub>i</sub> [zu übersetzen zu versuchen begonnen --<sub>i</sub>]  
the sentence is [to translate to try begun]

‘The sentence is begun to be tried to be translated’

Let us note again in passing that AI programs do not master the translation of (h) into English:

- DeepL:

Der Satz wird zu übersetzen zu versuchen  
begonnen

×

The sentence is begun to try to translate

- Google-Translator:

Der Satz wird zu übersetzen zu versuchen begonnen. ×

The sentence will begin to attempt to translate.

### Invitation to a five-verb cluster

☞ Dieser Satz<sub>Nom</sub> wurde<sub>i</sub> nicht [*zu übersetzen zu versuchen zu beginnen vergessen --i*]<sub>VC</sub>  
this sentence was not [to translate to try to begin forgotten]

‘It has not been forgotten to start trying to translate this sentence.’

DeepL: “This sentence was forgotten not to try to translate to begin with.” **wrong**

Google-T: “This sentence was forgotten not to begin trying to translate.” **wrong**

### When *five* verbs cluster, *six-verb clusters* are not far away – and so on ...

☞ Das sind Bereiche, die [*zu betreten gestattet zu bekommen versucht worden sind*].  
these are areas<sub>pl.-Nom</sub> that [to enter permitted to get tried been have<sub>3-pl.</sub>]

‘These are areas that have been tried to get permission to enter.’ (by DeepL!)

