

Arguments and events with German *bekommen+participle*

Abstract

The analysis of the so-called *bekommen*-passive in German has long been debated for at least two reasons: There is significant disagreement about the set of verbs that can be embedded by *bekommen*, and the resulting structure has mixed properties with respect to passive diagnostics. This paper takes on the task of disentangling this debate by examining the different components of this structure separately and exploring the empirical and theoretical complications associated with the embedded participles, the verb *bekommen* itself, the subject in the structure, and the presence of a passive VoiceP in the *bekommen*-complement one by one. The results suggest that *bekommen+participle* continues to pose significant questions about the syntactic relationships between complex events and their participants.

Keywords: argument structure, event structure, non-canonical passives, datives, applicatives

1 Introduction

This article examines the individual components of the syntactic structure in German variably referred to as the *bekommen*-passive, *kriegen*-passive, recipient passive, or dative passive, and its interpretation. This putative passive consists minimally of the verb *bekommen* ‘get, receive’ (or *kriegen*, also ‘get, receive’),¹ another verb in the form of a participle embedded under *bekommen*, and a thematically marked subject. In addition, it

¹The two verbs *bekommen* and *kriegen* are variably used in this construction, with variation conditioned at least by register (Eroms 2000) and region (Lenz 2013). Many speakers equally accept both *bekommen+participle* and *kriegen+participle*. Examples in this paper use *bekommen* throughout for consistency.

frequently (and, for some speakers, obligatorily) contains an accusative-marked object. There is a long-standing debate concerning the degree to which this structure is appropriately characterized as *passive*. My aim is to show that *bekommen+participle* in German becomes particularly illuminating when the investigation moves away from a taxonomic question (whether or not a particular structure should be *called* a passive), and instead focuses on the individual syntactic and morphological properties that we take to be relevant to the division of labor between thematic and event-structural properties in the study of argument structure. The paper makes two contributions: First, to remind the reader that the empirical picture regarding this structure is more complicated than is sometimes acknowledged, and, secondly, to argue that taking the individual contributions of both verbs and all arguments seriously significantly complicates the consensus view of *bekommen+participle* as a passive. Along these two lines of argumentation, the paper pursues the relatively modest goals of reopening the investigation of this old puzzle in German syntax, as well as sketching some of the questions that arise in discussions of Voice alternations and argument structure beyond this particular case study. An initial example of *bekommen+participle* is provided in (1a). The debate in the previous literature has been framed by the question whether (1a) should be considered a passive of (1b).

- (1) a. dass sie die Medaille überreicht bekommt
 that she.NOM the medal.ACC presented **RECEIVES**
 ‘that she is presented with the medal’
- b. dass der König ihr die Medaille überreicht
 that the king.NOM her.DAT the medal.ACC presents
 ‘that the king presents the medal to her’

The controversy is due to the fact that *bekommen+participle* shows somewhat mixed behavior when it comes to various perspectives on what makes a passive. Syntactic structures for which we find only a subset of the syntactic and morphological properties definitionally or conventionally associated with passive, are sometimes referred to as *non-canonical* passives (cf. Legate 2021 for a recent overview). The analysis of such structures crucially involves the characterization of various properties that are in principle

separate. In the case of *bekommen+participle*, these properties includes at least the status of *bekommen* itself as a full verb, light verb, or a passive auxiliary, the original merge-position of the subject and whether it undergoes A-movement and loses dative case in the process, as well as the presence of a passive VoiceP and the projection of an implicit agent in the structure. From this perspective, the investigation of structures as exemplified in (1a) moves beyond the question of whether it is a *passive* of (1b).

Due primarily to its relevance to case-theoretic considerations, the property that has received the most attention in the previous literature, especially recently, is dative-to-nominative conversion as the effect of the promotion of the indirect object in (1b) to subject in (1a) through (A-)movement (cf. Alexiadou et al. 2014, Lee-Schoenfeld & Twiner 2020). In section 3.2, I argue that evidence for such a relationship between these two argument positions is lacking. However, before moving on to problems for analyses that involve indirect object promotion, it is worthwhile to consider the reasons for the continued appeal of this assumption.

An important factor in this connection is the fact that the German *werden*-passive is only a direct object passive, so that there is an indirect object passive functional gap, as well as an affinity between dative-marked arguments in the language and possible subjects in *bekommen+participle*. Illustrating first that the *werden*-passive can only promote direct objects, note that the indirect object passive in (2c) is ungrammatical (importantly, the grammatical (2d), with retention of the dative on the indirect object, is merely a scrambled version of the direct object passive (2b)).

- (2) a. Der Richter überreicht ihr die Medaille.
the judge.NOM presents her.DAT the medal.ACC
‘The judge presents her with the medal.’
- b. Die Medaille wurde ihr (vom Richter) überreicht.
the medal.NOM was her.DAT (by.the judge) presented
‘The medal was presented to her (by the judge).’ *DO passive*
- c. *Sie wurde die Medaille überreicht.
she.NOM was the medal.ACC presented.
‘She was presented with the medal.’ *IO passive*

- d. Ihr wurde die Medaille überreicht.
her.DAT was the medal.NOM presented.
'She was presented with the medal.'

Scrambled DO passive

The ungrammaticality of (2c) opens up the functional gap that *bekommen+participle* ostensibly fills. This relates directly to the second source of plausibility for the passive analysis, which comes from the observation that recipients in ditransitives are dative-marked in German, as are beneficiaries and other affected so-called free datives. Meanwhile, subjects in *bekommen+participle* are subject to an affectedness restriction that makes them look like plausible promoted datives. However, it does not follow that the subjects in *bekommen+participle* have to be promoted dative arguments, and I will show in this paper that the link between dative-marked arguments in German and subjects in *bekommen+participle* is indirect and imperfect. I tentatively suggest that it emerges instead because *bekommen*-subjects are introduced by an applicative head, as are (certain classes of) dative-marked arguments (McIntyre 2006, Oya 2015; see also Pylkkänen 2008, Cuervo 2003, Bosse 2011). Viewing the subject in *bekommen+participle* as unrelated by movement to a dative-marked position in the clause has the welcome consequence of simplifying the picture for the German dative, because it removes the most convincing case of a dative-nominative alternation, and thus of dative behaving as *structural* case in the language.

The paper is structured to address components of the 'passive'-analysis one by one: The next section introduces empirical and analytical challenges for the view that *bekommen* acts as a passive auxiliary. Section 3 addresses the relationship between *bekommen*-subjects and dative-marked arguments, and calls the existence of a movement relationship between the two into question. Section 4 examines the evidence for the presence of a passive VoiceP in *bekommen+participle*. Section 5 discusses how the properties of the various components that a reanalysis of *bekommen+participle* should possess according to the previous sections can come together, enumerates open questions, and concludes.

2 The varying degrees of transfer in *bekommen+participle*

This and the following sections illustrate some of the main issues that have plagued analyses of *bekommen+participle*, especially insofar as they present complications for the view that the constructions straightforwardly instantiates an indirect object passive in German. In section 2.1, we begin by mapping out some of the considerable variation between speakers with respect to the acceptability of various types of verbs that can be embedded under *bekommen*. I argue that this variation is too systematic to be chalked off to idiosyncratic restrictions on verbs that can undergo passivization. In particular, as is explained in section 2.2, the variable degree to which speakers demand that the interpretation of *bekommen+participle* be compatible with the transparent meaning contribution of *bekommen* ‘receive’ speaks against an analysis of *bekommen* as a passive auxiliary.

Before we look at the empirical landscape in more detail, it is important to note that there are two other readings of *bekommen+participle* that have received attention in the literature.

- (3)
- | | | |
|----|---|-------------|
| a. | Sie bekommen die Wohnung renoviert.
they RECEIVE/MANAGE the apartment renovated
‘The apartment is being renovated for them.’ | ‘passive’ |
| b. | ‘They’re managing to renovate the apartment.’ | resultative |
| c. | ‘They’re receiving the apartment in a renovated state.’ | depictive |

In particular, the so-called ‘resultative’ reading denotes an achievement, with *bekommen* translating to ‘manage’ rather than ‘receive’. This second reading is generally accepted to be syntactically distinct from the structure under discussion in this paper, because the subject is interpreted agentively (cf. Reis 1985, Pittner 2011), which is crucially not the case either under the other interpretations of *bekommen+participle*, or for *bekommen* by itself. As such, we will set the resultative reading aside. The case of the the so-called ‘depictive’ or ‘predicative’ reading in (3c) is more complicated. As we see in (3), this reading receives a separate paraphrase that stresses the object-orientation of the participle. However, unlike with the resultative reading, the distinctness of the depictive reading

depends on the example under consideration. In the example above, the paraphrases focus on the apartment having undergone an event of renovation in (3a), and on being in a renovated state in (3c). However, these paraphrases in fact describe the same situation, as the state of being renovated necessarily describes the end state of an event of renovation. The literature has typically appealed to a distinction in category, arguing that the participle is adjectival in the structure that receives the depictive reading, and verbal in the putative passive (Reis 1985, Oya 2015). I will briefly return to this argument in section 5.2.

2.1 Variable restrictions beyond idiosyncrasy

Before discussing issues in the analysis of *bekommen+participle* in more detail, this section addresses which verbs can appear as the participle embedded under *bekommen*. This is one of two major sets of restrictions on the acceptability of *bekommen+participle* (the other consists of restrictions on the subject, discussed in section 3). These restrictions have sometimes been characterized as the type of idiosyncratic exception that is not uncommon in argument structure alternations, which would exclude them from bearing on the nature of the structure in which they fail to appear. Although it is indeed difficult to describe the sets of verbs that are or are not acceptable when embedded under *bekommen* definitively, especially because there is significant regional and inter-speaker variation in this regard, my aim here is to show that it would be hasty to characterize these restrictions as idiosyncratic.

It is empirically well-established that *bekommen+participle* is canonically used with the embedded verb's meaning relating to an event of receiving (Leirbukt 1997, Bader 2012, Bader & Häussler 2013, Diedrichsen 2012). This means that participles frequently and uncontroversially found with *bekommen* denote transfer-of-possession events with a recipient argument, and are thus inherently compatible with the most transparent semantic contribution of the lexical verb *bekommen* (to receive). (4) illustrates this most widespread and uncontroversially grammatical use case with the embedded verbs *schicken* 'to gift', *senden* 'to send', and *überweisen* 'to transfer'.

- (4) a. dass Maria ein Pony geschenkt bekommt
 that Maria.NOM a pony.ACC gifted **RECEIVES**
 ‘that Maria is gifted a pony’
- b. dass mein Vater ein Paket geschickt bekommt
 that my father.NOM a package.ACC sent **RECEIVES**
 ‘that the father is sent a package’
- c. dass meine Mitarbeiterin ihr Gehalt überwiesen bekommt
 that my coworker.NOM her wages.ACC transferred **RECEIVES**
 ‘that my coworker has her wages transferred’

Noteworthy properties of these initial examples include the following: They all feature an accusative theme, which is part of the canonical argument structure of both *bekommen*, and the embedded verb. Thus, for example, the pony in (4a) is understood to be both *gifted* and *received*. Secondly, every example denotes a positive transfer of possession, in which the surface subject is the recipient. As discussed in the introduction, this parallelism is at the root of the analytic intuition that *bekommen* acts as an indirect object passive auxiliary in (4), due to the fact that the embedded verbs have a recipient indirect object in their active ditransitive use, compare (5).

- (5) a. dass er Maria ein Pony schenkt
 that he.NOM Maria.DAT a pony.ACC gifts
 ‘that he gifts Maria a pony’
- b. dass die Firma meinem Vater ein Paket schickt
 that the company.NOM my father.DAT a package.ACC sends
 ‘that the company sends my father a package’
- c. dass der Chef meiner Mitarbeiterin ihr Gehalt überweist
 that the boss.NOM my coworker.DAT her wages.ACC transfers
 ‘that the boss transfers my coworker her wages’

However, there is another perspective on the examples in (4) that immediately points to a problem for the view that (4) are simply indirect object passives of (5), relating to the contribution of the verb *bekommen* itself. A side-by-side comparison reveals that in this type of sentence, *bekommen+participle* functions very similarly in terms of argument structure and interpretation as *bekommen* does on its own:

- (6) a. dass Maria ein Pony bekommt
 that Maria.NOM a pony.ACC **RECEIVES**
 ‘that Maria receives a pony’
- b. dass Maria ein Pony geschenkt bekommt
 that Maria.NOM a pony.ACC gifted **RECEIVES**
 ‘that Maria is gifted a pony’ / ‘that Maria receives a pony as a gift’

The issue of the relative contribution of *bekommen* itself is taken up in section 2.2. At this juncture, note that in these kinds of examples, which constitute the most widely available ‘core’ cases of *bekommen+participle*, the depictive reading and putative passive reading can receive distinct paraphrases, but do not describe different situations (cf. the translations in (6b)). Before we turn to examples where that is not the case, I introduce a second way of conceptualizing the necessary distinctions in terms of event-centric versus role-centric characterizations of argument structure phenomena.

2.1.1 Comparing event-centric and role-centric characterizations

In the canonical instances of *bekommen+participle* as introduced above, there are at least two ways of characterizing the relationship between the thematic role of the subject and properties of the event. For instance, in the examples in (4), both of the following are true:

1. there is a transfer-of-possession event *e* culminating in a receipt, and the subject *x* is affected by that event (event-centric)
2. there is some event *e'* and the subject *x'* is the recipient connected to that event (role-centric)

In the examples we have seen so far, the equivalency between the event-centric and role-centric characterization is impossible to break up, because the receipt of the theme by the subject is entailed in exactly the same way as Mary receiving a pony as a gift entails Mary receiving a pony.

- (7) *Maria hat ein Pony geschenkt bekommen, aber sie hat es nicht bekommen.
 Maria has a pony gifted **RECEIVED**, but she has it not received
 ‘Mary received a pony as a gift, but she didn’t receive it.’

In this and the following subsections, we will see that other types of complements that are available with *bekommen* to subsets of speakers allow us to tease apart these characterizations and favor a (less restrictive) version of the event-centric view. The first extension to the dataset under consideration shows that transitive verbs like *waschen* ‘to wash’ or *kochen* ‘to cook’ can be embedded under *bekommen*, with the subject receiving an interpretation that is closer to a beneficiary than a recipient.

- (8) a. dass wir die Teller gewaschen bekommen
 that we.NOM the plates.ACC washed **RECEIVE**
 ‘that the plates are washed for us’
- b. dass Max Nudeln gekocht bekommt
 that Max.NOM pasta.ACC cooked **RECEIVES**
 ‘that pasta is cooked for Max’

It is important to briefly explain how examples like those in (8) fit in with the idea of *bekommen+participle* as a passive. German allows the addition of dative-marked arguments denoting affectees of various types to otherwise transitive sentences with great regularity. These so-called free datives, illustrated with beneficiary interpretations in (9), in turn provide a potential source structure for the idea that the subject in *bekommen+participle* is a promoted dative object.

- (9) a. dass sie uns die Teller waschen
 that they.NOM us.DAT the plates.ACC wash
 ‘that they wash the plates for us’
- b. dass seine Mutter Max Nudeln kocht
 that his mother.NOM Max.DAT pasta.ACC cooks
 ‘that his mother cooks pasta for Max’

As will be discussed in more detail in section 3, there are reasons to question the conclusion that the existence of free datives as in (9) should lead us to believe that the examples in (8) involve promoted free datives in subject position.

Note that the entailment relationship discussed above ceases to hold in these cases – while pasta being cooked for Max still typically results in his receiving the pasta, this is not necessarily true:

- (10) Max hat Nudeln gekocht bekommen, aber er hat sie nicht bekommen.
 Max has pasta cooked **RECEIVED**, but he has them not received
 ‘Max had pasta cooked for him, but he didn’t receive it.’

In these examples, it becomes apparent that events and their participants need to be related somewhat flexibly in *bekommen+participle*. This is also the case with complement participles of ditransitive verbs that, in contrast to the examples in the previous subsection, do not encode a literal transfer, (11a). It is worth pointing out at this juncture that this flexibility is not a matter of giving up assigning a RECIPIENT role in favor of a BENEFICIARY role, as negatively affected recipients are also perfectly acceptable subjects (11b).

- (11) a. dass Sarah ihr Lieblingsbuch vorgelesen bekam
 that Sarah.NOM her favorite.book.ACC read **RECEIVED**
 ‘that Sarah had her favorite book read to her’
- b. dass ihre Großmutter die falsche Versicherung angedreht
 that her grandmother.NOM the wrong insurance.ACC sold
 bekam
RECEIVED
 ‘that her grandmother got sold the wrong insurance’

In combination, the facts in this section significantly complicate the role-centric characterization. A version of the event-centric characterization remains true, however. In particular, we maintain that *bekommen+participle* involves a transfer event (but not one necessarily culminating in receipt) and a subject affected by that event. This more abstract characterization is a step towards explaining the variation in the acceptability of *bekommen+participle* between speakers: The more permissive grammars include a more abstract statement of the characterization. This becomes especially apparent in the case of monotransitive complement verbs.

2.1.2 Monotransitives

A particularly contentious class of data judgments in the previous literature concerns the possibility of *bekommen+participle* with monotransitive verbs. For some speakers, especially in West Central Germany (for these purposes, parts of Hesse and Rhineland-

Palatinate, cf. Lenz 2013), the construction is grammatical with *some* embedded participles that have a single (typically dative) object in the active, such as *helfen* ‘to help’, *applaudieren* ‘to applaud’, or *drohen* ‘to threaten’.

- (12) a. dass Susanne uns {hilft, droht, applaudiert}
 that Susanne.NOM us.DAT {helps, threatens, applauds}
 ‘that Susanne helps/threatens/applauds us’
- b. dass wir geholfen bekommen
 that we.NOM helped **RECEIVE**
 ‘that we are being helped’
- c. dass wir gedroht bekommen
 that we.NOM threatened **RECEIVE**
 ‘that we are being threatened’
- d. dass wir applaudiert bekommen
 that we.NOM applauded **RECEIVE**
 ‘that we are being applauded.’

Notably, all of the verbs of this type with which *bekommen+participle* is grammatical for this set of speakers also denote a transfer of possession on some level of abstraction, and verbs that do not result in ungrammatical *bekommen+participle* configurations, even when they take a single dative argument without *bekommen* (cf. Leirbukt 1997, Oya 2015).

- (13) a. dass Clara uns {begegnet, folgt}
 that Clara.NOM us.DAT {meets, follows}
 ‘that Clara meets/follows us’
- b. *dass wir begegnet bekommen
 that we.NOM met **RECEIVE**
 ‘We are being met.’
- c. *dass wir gefolgt bekommen
 that we.NOM followed **RECEIVE**
 ‘We are being followed.’

Most previous work has either operated on the assumption that no monotransitives are possible in *bekommen+participle* (which is true for more restrictive speakers), or implicitly or explicitly predicted that all monotransitives should be grammatical, safe for

idiosyncratic exceptions. This is empirically inadequate: Not only do speakers who accept (12) exist, but they consistently require that a transfer construal is available. More nuanced proposals on this point include Cook's (2006) thoughts on a 'beneficiary requirement' and Oya (2015), who argues that the speakers who accept (12) are treating the embedded verbs as 'conceptually transitive' (2015:313), with an implicit theme and an applied dative. While I share the underlying intuition that such examples are improved when and because they can be conceptualized as involving an event of transfer, I differ from Oya in maintaining that the locus of the transfer interpretation remains with *bekommen*, rather than the embedded verb (cf. section 2.2). The second point of theoretical relevance of the examples in this section concerns the degree to which they present an especially strong case for dative-to-nominative conversion. In this vein, it has been argued that at least the speakers who allow (12) have reanalyzed the structure as passive in the sense of containing a passive auxiliary and a promoted indirect object, even if other speakers have not, or if that analysis does not apply to other instances of *bekommen+participle* (cf. Abraham 2005). I return to the issues surrounding dative-nominative conversion in section 3. Note finally that examples of this type could be claimed not to have an object-oriented depictive reading definitionally, because there is no object.

2.1.3 Privative transfer

Completing the overview of potential complements in *bekommen+participle*, the second class of contentious judgments is found when we turn to complements denoting a *negative* or *privative* transfer of possession, in which something (the theme) is taken away from the subject.

- (14) a. dass der Mann die inneren Organe entnommen bekam
 that the man.NOM the inner organs.ACC removed **RECEIVED**
 'that the man had his inner organs removed'
- b. dass Laura ihre Gitarre gestohlen bekommt
 that Laura.NOM her guitar.ACC stolen **RECEIVES**
 'that Laura had her guitar stolen'

Examples of this type further complicate the role-centric characterization discussed above. For speakers who allow privative transfer, the subjects in (14) are clearly not recipients or beneficiaries. The event-centric characterization, on the other hand, remains possible: the subjects in (14) are (negatively) affected by a transfer-of-possession event. Of course, this use of *bekommen+participle* is, informally speaking, the furthest away from the meaning of *bekommen* on its own. In particular, *bekommen* on its own never denotes a privative transfer of possession. We therefore have to assume that speakers that can accommodate (14) are applying a bleached denotation of *bekommen* in *bekommen+participle*, one which encodes a transfer event, but not the direction of transfer. For speakers that disallow (14), the picture is more straightforward, in that the direction of transfer is the same for *bekommen+participle* as it is for *bekommen*. Crucially, because the transfer meaning is retained in either grammar, *bekommen* does not act as a mere auxiliary even for the more permissive speakers, as discussed in the next subsection. That the transfer requirement is indeed preserved can be demonstrated with data as in (15), where the subject is still intended to be negatively affected, but there is no transfer event.

- (15) a. #dass ich den Hund getötet bekomme
 that I.NOM the dog.ACC killed **RECEIVE**
 ‘that the dog is killed on me’
- b. *dass ich am Arm gerissen bekomme
 that I.NOM at.the arm.DAT pulled **RECEIVE**
 ‘that my arm is being pulled’

(15a) is not marked as outright ungrammatical because it is grammatical under the resultative interpretation, and, as a reviewer points out, potentially also if it can be construed as a positive transfer, similarly to what we saw in (8). Crucially, the judgments disallowing a negatively affected subject without a transfer event were found to apply for even the most permissive speakers, showing the persistence of the transfer interpretation. Note finally that the availability of privative transfer complements for some speakers is of particular interest in the comparison of the putative passive reading and the depictive reading of the construction. The equivalence of the respective paraphrases breaks down in these cases

– to have a guitar stolen is not to receive a guitar in a stolen state (cf. Abraham 2005). What this should tell us about the analysis of the syntactic structure is a separate question, to which I return in section 5.2. The next subsection recapitulates and discusses the relevance of the transfer meaning to the analysis of *bekommen*.

2.2 The persistence of ‘bekommen’

We are now in a position to examine the first component of the putative passive structure, *bekommen* itself. As shown in the last subsection, in the most widely accepted instances of *bekommen+participle*, the syntactic and semantic contribution of *bekommen* itself is transparently preserved in the construction, as shown in (16), repeated from (6):

- (16) a. dass Maria ein Pony bekommt
 that Maria.NOM a pony.ACC **RECEIVES**
 ‘that Maria receives a pony’
- b. dass Maria ein Pony geschenkt bekommt
 that Maria.NOM a pony.ACC gifted **RECEIVES**
 ‘that Maria is gifted a pony’ / ‘that Maria receives a pony as a gift’

In examples of this type, it is *bekommen* that does the heavy lifting by encoding a transfer relation and uniformly introducing an affected argument as its subject (see next section), the participle merely serves to specify the manner or means of the the transfer. These parallels cast doubt on the status of *bekommen* as an auxiliary,² if we take that to mean that it could not impose its own event- and argument-structural properties (Haider 1986, Abraham 2005, Cook 2006). At the same time, we have seen that *bekommen* can appear without an overt accusative object for some speakers in *bekommen+participle*, which it cannot on its own, and with a weakened meaning contribution in the context of privative transfer. In line with arguments in the previous literature that verbs like *bekommen* in German, as well as verbs in other languages that translate to English *get* or *have* function as ‘semi-lexical’ or light verbs because they realize a particular functional head (say, *v*)

²Some of this discussion may remind the reader of a similar debate surrounding the English *get-passive*. For recent discussion of the event-structural contribution to the interpretation of the get-passive, see Biggs & Embick (2022).

in the context of other functional heads, or, alternatively, that they realize a sequence of functional heads created through head movement (see a.o. Pesetsky 1995, Richards 2001, Harley 2002, McIntyre, 2005, 2006, Sigurðsson & Wood 2012), it is possible to make sense of this range of properties by assuming that German *bekommen* is a light verb, denoting a weakly specified transfer-of-possession event. It is important to stress that, as we have seen, the transfer meaning restricts possible complements even in the monotransitive and privative contexts.

For the monotransitives, as Haider (1984, 1986) points out, the many speakers who do not permit them as complements in *bekommen+participle* are getting this transitivity requirement from *bekommen* itself. Arguably, however, even the speakers who do allow monotransitive complements require that the event introduced by *bekommen* can be construed as a transfer event, as we saw in the previous section. If this does involve postulating some sort of implicit theme argument, the implicit theme would have to be an argument of *bekommen*, not of the embedded verb (contra Oya 2015). In (12b), for example, an implicit theme ‘help_N’ would be the theme of receiving, not of helping. privative transfer

While this section has discussed restrictions imposed by *bekommen* on its complement, a second set of considerations concerns the restrictions it imposes on its subject, again underscoring the point that it does not behave as we would expect from an auxiliary.

3 Promoted datives and *bekommen*-subjects

This section discusses the restrictions on the subject of *bekommen*, alluded to in earlier sections, in more detail. Section 3.1 shows how these restrictions relate to dative arguments in German, and section 3.2 shows that evidence for a movement relationship between the two kinds of arguments is lacking.

3.1 Restrictions on the subject

It has long been noted that the subject in *bekommen+passive* is almost always animate (see e.g. Wegener 1985), which is not expected under an analysis that involves the promotion of indirect objects to subject, which should a priori apply to any indirect object indiscriminately. The fact that at least some inanimate subjects are indeed ruled out is illustrated with examples such as the following from Cook (2006):

- (17) a. *dass das Buch ein Zitat entnommen bekam
that the book.NOM a quote.ACC from.took **RECEIVED**
'that the quote got taken from the book'
- b. dass er dem Buch ein Zitat entnahm
that he.NOM the book.DAT a quote.ACC from.took
'that he took a quote from the book'
- c. dass der Mann die inneren Organe entnommen bekam
that the man.NOM the inner organs.ACC removed **RECEIVED**
'that the man had his inner organs removed'

The 'book' in (17a) is impossible as a subject in *bekommen+participle*, even for speakers that allow verbs denoting a negative transfer-of-possession such as *entnehmen* in the construction (see section 2.1.3), as becomes clear in comparison with (17c). This, of course, is unexpected under an analysis that treats (17a) as an indirect object passive of (17b). An alternative explanation of the ungrammaticality of (17a) lies in the fact that the book is not *affected* by being quoted (cf. Lee-Schoenfeld 2006, Bosse 2011, Lee-Schoenfeld & Twiner 2020).

A reviewer rightly points out that the notion of *affectedness*, which I will continue to make use of for the remainder of the article, is in its own right somewhat vexed and often imprecise (cf. Beavers 2011, Li 2017). What is needed in this context is a restricted version of the notion that requires the arguments to undergo a physical or emotional change or effect, as opposed to some broader sense that would include Themes, for example.

Importantly for our purposes, the range of subjects that is possible with *bekommen+participle* is again closely tied to the range of subjects that are possible with *bekommen* on its own.

In most of the examples throughout this article so far, the *bekommen*-subjects could in principle be more narrowly classified as RECIPIENTS or BENEFICIARIES, but as Haider (2001) observes, there are also more EXPERIENCER-like subjects with *bekommen*:

- (18) a. dass der Junge große Angst bekam
 that the boy.NOM big fear.ACC **RECEIVED**
 ‘that the boy became very afraid’ (adapted from Haider 2001)
- b. dass das Mädchen den Eindruck bekommt, nicht gewinnen zu
 that the girl.NOM the impression.ACC **RECEIVES** not win to
 können
 can
 ‘that the girl is getting the impression that she can’t win’

The affectedness restriction is better suited to explaining atypical but grammatical *bekommen*-subjects than an animacy restriction. For instance, it has been noted (see e.g. Reis 1985) that speakers with permissive grammars do tend to accept examples as in (19), violating the animacy restriction:

- (19) a. Die Firma bekommt stets die besten Arbeitskräfte zugeführt.
 the company **RECEIVES** always the best workers.ACC supplied
 ‘The company always gets supplied with the best workers.’
- b. Das Substantiv bekommt eine Endung hinzugefügt.
 the noun.NOM **RECEIVES** a suffix.ACC added
 ‘A suffix is added to the noun.’

While Reis (1985) takes these examples to show that there is no animacy restriction on the subject (the restriction being unexpected under the passive analysis), I would argue that they are better understood as featuring atypical affectees (here, more specifically recipients). In (19a), even aside from the fact that entities such as ‘companies’ are made up of people and thus easily interpreted as animate, a company is of course affected by the workers it is supplied with, as the added workers change the makeup of the entity itself. In the especially linguist-friendly (19b), the ‘noun’ is in principle a good example of an inanimate, but is again affected (here by a morphological operation). In contrast, in the ungrammatical case in (18a), taking a quote from a book leaves the book entirely unaffected. Note again that the examples in (19) are also grammatical with *bekommen* by

itself, as long as the subject is understood as affected:

- (20) a. Die Firma bekommt die besten Arbeitskräfte.
the company **RECEIVES** the best workers.ACC
'The company always gets supplied with the best workers.'
- b. Das Substantiv bekommt eine Dativendung.
the noun.NOM **RECEIVES** a dative.suffix.ACC
'A dative suffix is added to the noun.'

The affectedness restriction favors the view that the subject is an argument of *bekommen* rather than the participle. At the same time it also plays a role in explaining the continuing appeal of the indirect object passive analysis of *bekommen+participle*, because many German datives are subject to similar restrictions (cf. Lee-Schoenfeld 2006, Bosse 2011 a.o.).

The idea that *bekommen*-subjects are independently subject to the same kind of restriction that affects many dative arguments in German means that we can capture the relationship between the two kinds of arguments without appealing to a movement dependency. This indirect account of the relationship between datives and *bekommen*-subjects (via the shared affectedness restriction) opens up the possibility that the link is not perfect. As we have already seen in the previous sections, there are verbs that take a dative argument in the transitive or ditransitive active, but fail to occur in *bekommen+participle*. The reverse holds as well: as (21) shows, verbs that take two accusative objects in their ditransitive use can in principle occur in *bekommen+participle*.

- (21) a. dass der Meister ihn das Klavierspiel lehrt
that the master.NOM him.ACC the piano-playing.ACC teaches
'that the master teaches him piano'
- b. dass er das Klavierspiel gelehrt bekommt
that he.NOM the piano-playing.ACC taught **RECEIVES**
'that he is taught piano'

These examples show at least that a subject in *bekommen+participle* does not have to correspond to a dative in the ditransitive active.³ As Lee-Schoenfeld (2018) argues, the

³As a reviewer points out, this argument fails to go through for speakers that allow *lehren* with an

fact that examples like (21b) are grammatical is to some extent expected if (22b) is a regular passive, which in the small set of double accusative verbs in German absorbs the first accusative rather than a dative (which of course is not present to begin with). However, this analysis assumes that the first accusative in (21a) is in the structural accusative position, which raises two problems: The first is that a *werden*-passive promoting the same accusative to subject is marginal at best (see (22a)).⁴

- (22) a. ??dass er den Seiltrick gelehrt wurde
 that he.NOM the rope.trick.ACC taught was
 ‘that he was taught the rope trick’
- b. dass jemand ihn den Seiltrick lehrte
 that someone.NOM him.ACC the rope.trick.ACC taught
 ‘that someone taught him the rope trick’

The second, perhaps even more pertinent to the issue at hand, is that structural accusatives cannot generally be promoted to subject in the ostensible *bekommen*-passive, even when there is no intervening dative and the accusative is a potential affectee ((23), cf. Haider 1984, 1986). It has to be acknowledged here that it depends on the exact implementation of a movement analysis of *bekommen*+*participle* whether or not (23) is predicted to be grammatical. However, under the assumption that the German passive is essentially *symmetric* and *can* use *bekommen* as the auxiliary with raised would-be-accusatives, as Lee-Schoenfeld assumes in the derivation of (21b), it is unclear what prevents (23).

- (23) a. dass Luisa ihn rettet
 that Luisa.NOM him.ACC saves
 ‘that Luisa kisses him’

alternative DAT-ACC case pattern, which is indeed attested. However, four informants and the author disallow dative-marked indirect objects with *lehren* and allow (21b).

⁴Lee-Schoenfeld (2018) gives (22a) as ‘?’, contrasting it with (i), which is admittedly even worse:

- (i) *dass der Seiltrick ihn gelehrt wurde
 that the rope.trick.NOM he.ACC taught was
 ‘that the rope trick was taught to him’

I would tend to agree with Lee-Schoenfeld that (i) is ruled out because the DP ‘the rope trick’ is lower than ‘him’, but do not agree that (22a) is essentially grammatical by virtue of being more acceptable than (i).

- b. *dass er gerettet bekommt
 that he.NOM saved **RECEIVES**
 ‘that he gets saved’

It is also worth mentioning the flipside of this issue: under a symmetric analysis of the German passive, in which *bekommen* is used as the passive auxiliary when an indirect object is promoted to subject, it needs to be possible for dative to be absorbed in the passive, as is indeed proposed by Alexiadou et al. (2014), who claim that the head that would have assigned dative case incorporates into the Voice+v complex, which then spells out as *bekommen*. However, the direct object dative is retained in the *werden*-passive.

- (24) a. Er hilft uns.
 he.NOM helps us.DAT
 ‘He helps us.’
- b. Uns wird geholfen.
 Us.DAT are helped
 ‘We are being helped.’
- c. Wir bekommen geholfen.
 We.NOM **RECEIVE** helped
 ‘We are being helped.’

If the only reason for the difference between (24b) and (24c) is that dative is absorbed by *bekommen* in (24c), it is hard to imagine how any explanation for the fact that the *werden*-passive is much less restrictive than *bekommen+participle* could be maintained. If, on the other hand, the surface subject in *bekommen+participle* is simply never merged in the complement, there is no longer a need to assume and account for a dative-nominative alternation in German at all, which of course explains the retention of the dative in (24) as well. Of course this raises the question whether there is any independent evidence for or against A-movement in *bekommen+participle*.

3.2 Evidence for A-movement?

In this subsection, I will briefly show that evidence for an A-movement dependency, which the previous subsection showed was not necessary in accounting for the indirect

link between *bekommen*-subjects and dative-marked arguments, is independently lacking. There is reason to think that the subject is a thematic subject of *bekommen* in *bekommen+participle*, considering the possibility of an adverb that expresses an attitude of the subject, impossible in the *werden*-passive. Haider (1984) shows this by contrasting (25a) and (25b).

- (25) a. Ich bekomme gern Blumen geschenkt.
 I.NOM **RECEIVE** gladly flowers.ACC given
 ‘I enjoy being given flowers.’
- b. Mir werden gern Blumen geschenkt.
 Me.DAT are gladly flowers.ACC given
 ONLY ‘People enjoy giving me flowers.’

I here add (26) to show that once again, the association of the adverb with the subject is exactly the same in *bekommen+participle* as it is when *bekommen* is used on its own.

- (26) Ich bekomme gern Blumen.
 I.NOM **RECEIVE** gladly flowers.ACC
 ‘I enjoy receiving flowers.’

Crucially, the adverb *gern* can be oriented towards the subject, which qualifies as an attitude holder, in both (25a) and (26), but can only modify the implicit agent in (25b).

Note that it is not possible to dismiss these data as only applying to the depictive reading (cf. Reis 1985), as similar examples with monotransitives or privative transfer are readily constructed:

- (27) a. Ich bekomme gern geholfen.
 I.NOM **RECEIVE** gladly helped
 ‘I enjoy getting help.’
- b. Ich bekomme meine Schuhe ungerne weggenommen.
 I.NOM **RECEIVE** my shoes.ACC grudgingly taken.away
 ‘I dislike having my shoes taken away.’

This contrast with the *werden*-passive suggests that the *bekommen*-subject is thematically marked, and base-generated high, rather than moved from the indirect object position.

It is also worth briefly mentioning idiom chunk interpretation in this domain. Reis (1985)

argues that if we find arguments in subject position in *bekommen+participle* that are fixed dative-marked objects in idioms, and the idiomatic interpretation is retained in *bekommen+participle*, this would support movement of the subject from the dative-marked indirect object position. However, as has been previously noted (Reis 1985, Haider 1986, Lee-Schoenfeld & Twiner 2020), idioms with fixed datives are hard to come by in German. What would be required to make this type of argument is an idiom with a fixed dative argument that retains the idiomatic meaning in the *werden*-passive, allowing us to check whether it does so in *bekommen+participle* as well. (28) is a candidate:

- (28) a. dem Affen Zucker geben
 the monkey.DAT sugar.ACC give
 ‘to do what you want’, lit. ‘to give the monkey sugar’
- b. dass dem Affen Zucker gegeben wurde
 that the monkey.DAT sugar.ACC given was
 ‘that we did what we wanted’, lit. ‘that the monkey was given sugar’
- c. ?dass der Affe Zucker gegeben bekommt
 that the monkey.NOM sugar.ACC given **RECEIVES**
 ‘that the monkey is given sugar’

For speakers that have this pattern of judgments, whereby the idiomatic meaning is retained in the *werden*-passive, but not with the *bekommen+participle*, this diagnostic does not support that the latter also involves object promotion in the same way as the former. However, as indicated by the ‘?’ judgment in (28b), a caveat is that *geben* (‘give’) is independently not very good in *bekommen+participle* for many speakers. Crucially, however, there seem to be no examples with idioms that fulfill the criteria and show retention of the idiomatic meaning in *bekommen+participle* in the previous literature that hold up to scrutiny (cf. Lee-Schoenfeld & Twiner 2020): they either are not passivizable at all, do not contain fixed dative arguments, or are so obscure that it is impossible to get judgments. The idea that the surface subject is promoted from an underlying dative-marked position thus fails to receive support from idiom interpretation.

To summarize the findings of this section, the shared *affectedness* restriction explains the affinity between *bekommen*-subjects and dative-marked arguments without the need

to postulate a movement dependency between the two, and evidence for movement is independently lacking.

4 Passive VoiceP and implicit agents

As the previous sections have examined the status of *bekommen* and the relationship between dative-marked arguments and *bekommen-subjects*, the last component of the structure that requires closer investigation is the complement of *bekommen*, and in particular the presence of a passive VoiceP above the participle, and the availability of implicit agents and agentive *von*-phrases. I will show that there is indeed evidence for these components of a passive analysis of *bekommen+participle*, pointing out some sources of confusion in the previous literature along the way.

Turning first to the possibility of including agentive *by*-phrases, German *von*-phrases, (29) first illustrates that they can appear in the *werden*-passive.

- (29) a. dass die Blumen [von Peter] gegossen werden
that the flowers.NOM by Peter watered are
'that the flowers are watered by Peter'
- b. dass die Bücher [von Sarah] gelesen werden
that the book.NOM by Sarah read are
'that the books are read by Sarah'

Note, however, that *von* can also mean 'of' or 'from', with the *von*-phrase referring to possessors or sources, as shown in (30), in neither case is the agentive interpretation available.

- (30) a. dass das Boot von Luisa am schnellsten sank
that the boat of Luisa the fastest sank
'that Luisa's boat sank the fastest'
- b. dass Thomas mir etwas Süßes von der Bäckerei
that Thomas.NOM me.DAT something sweet.ACC from the bakery
mitbringt
brings
'that Thomas brings me something sweet from the bakery'

The source interpretation in particular is important to keep in mind when evaluating whether agentive *von*-phrases can appear with *bekommen+participle*. It turns out that they can, but that care needs to be taken to separate the agentive reading from the source reading in this context, especially because the verb *bekommen* ‘receive’ is independently compatible with a *von*-phrase, which is again interpreted as specifying a source. To see this, consider the minimal pair in (31), where the sentence in (31a) has *bekommen* on its own occurring with the *von*-phrase, whereas it appears in *bekommen+participle* in (31b) with the participle of *schenken* (‘to gift’).

- (31) a. Zu Weihnachten bekomme ich ein Pony von meinen Eltern.
 for Christmas **RECEIVE** I.NOM a pony.ACC from my parents
 ‘For Christmas I’m getting a pony from my parents.’
- b. Zu Weihnachten bekomme ich ein Pony von meinen Eltern
 for Christmas **RECEIVE** I.NOM a pony.ACC from my parents
 geschenkt.
 gifted
 ‘For Christmas I’m getting a pony from my parents as a gift.’

If we assume that the interpretation of the *von*-phrase in (31b) is much the same as in (31a), then examples of this type are poorly suited to showing the availability of an agentive *von*-phrases. The question then becomes whether the *von*-phrase is still interpreted non-agentively in the more abstract transfer contexts as discussed in section 2. Here, however, we do see genuinely agentive *von*-phrases. For instance, (32a) is only felicitous if the doctor bandaged Max’ arm herself, and not if she got a nurse to do it for her (acting as an indirect causer). Note that this in contrast to (31), where both examples are perfectly compatible with a context in which the pony was actually handed over by a third party.

- (32) a. dass Max den Arm von der Ärztin verbunden bekommt
 that Max the arm.ACC by the doctor bandaged **RECEIVED**
 ‘that Max had his arm bandaged by the doctor’
- b. ?dass Laura ihre Gitarre von Max gestohlen bekommt
 that Laura.NOM her guitar.ACC by Max stolen **RECEIVES**
 ‘that Laura had her guitar stolen by Max’

Interestingly, (32b) is reduced in acceptability even for speakers who otherwise accept

bekommen+participle with privative transfer (although a reviewer reports that they find (32b) no worse with the *von*-phrase than without). This suggests that there is at least a moderate pressure to reconcile the agentive interpretation of the *von*-phrase with the source interpretation tied to *bekommen*, which is of course impossible in (32b).

In this section, we have seen that the question of whether or not *bekommen+participle* can occur with agentive by-phrases is more complicated than had been acknowledged in the previous literature. While the mere possibility of including a *von*-phrase surface string does not suffice to make this point, the separation of the agent and source interpretation ultimately allows us to strengthen the conclusion that there is an embedded passive VoiceP in *bekommen+participle*, in line with previous proposals.

In a similar vein, familiar diagnostics for the projection of an implicit agent, such as control into purpose clauses and agent-oriented adverbs, also go through (cf. Alexiadou et al. 2014). In (33), the examples are deliberately constructed to exclude the surface subject as the intent holder, for reasons that will become clear momentarily. Both tests support the possibility of including an implicit agent.

- (33) a. Das Baby bekam die Impfung absichtlich später verabreicht.
the baby **RECEIVED** the vaccine intentionally later administered
'The baby was vaccinated later on purpose.' (intent holder: the parents, not
the baby)
- b. Das Baby bekam die Impfung früh verabreicht, um es zu
the baby **RECEIVED** the vaccine early administered to it to
beschützen.
protect
'The baby was vaccinated early to protect it.'

Two notes are in order about these tests, however. It has been noted previously that neither purpose clauses nor so-called agent-oriented adverbs are perfect diagnostics for the syntactic projection of an implicit agent (cf. Biggs & Embick 2022 and references therein). Both types of adjuncts are regularly found oriented towards non-agent surface subjects, see (34a) (under the interpretation that MLK got himself arrested on purpose), and absent grammatically represented agents, see (34b).

- (34) a. MLK was deliberately arrested. (Biggs & Embick 2022:239, citing Jackendoff 1972:83)
- b. The thermostat is on low [PRO to save money]. (Biggs & Embick 2022:239)

That such modifiers can be oriented towards non-agent surface subjects in particular is also at issue in German *bekommen+participle*. Both types of adjunct are also possible with *bekommen* without a participle.

- (35) a. Der Junge bekommt absichtlich eine Erkältung.
 the boy.NOM **RECEIVES** on.purpose a cold
 ‘The boy gets a cold on purpose.’
- b. Der Junge bekommt eine Erkältung, um nicht zur Schule zu
 the boy.NOM **RECEIVES** a cold to not to school to
 müssen.
 must
 ‘The boy gets a cold in order not to have to go school.’

In these examples (which, as a reviewer points out, require a it to be possible to contract a cold on purpose), the most salient reading is one in which the boy himself is responsible for getting a cold. As discussed in section 3, the *bekommen*-subject qualifies as a attitude holder, given the possibility of modification with *gerne* ‘gladly, with pleasure’. It does not, however, have an agentive interpretation, regardless of whether a participle is present. Biggs & Embick (2022) argue that modification with instrumental PPs is a more robust diagnostic for passive VoiceP in English. For the German data, we make an interesting prediction here: In spite of the fact that the paper generally argues for a strong parallel between *bekommen* and *bekommen+participle*, they are predicted to behave differently with respect to the inclusion of an instrument – if there is an embedded passive VoiceP, an instrument is predicted to be licensed with *bekommen+participle*, but not with *bekommen* by itself. This prediction is borne out:

- (36) a. Der Junge bekommt mit einem benutzten Taschentuch eine
 the boy.NOM **RECEIVES** with a used tissue a

Erkältung verpasst.
cold given
'The boy gets given a cold using a used tissue.'

- b. *Der Junge bekommt mit einem benutzten Taschentuch eine
the boy.NOM **RECEIVES** with a used tissue a
Erkältung.
cold
'The boy gets a cold using a used tissue.'

To summarize the findings from this section, there is evidence for a passive VoiceP in the complement of *bekommen*, but it is more difficult to detect than the previous literature has suggested. The last section synthesizes the findings concerning the various components of the *bekommen+participle* structure and discusses properties that an analysis should possess.

5 Components of an analysis

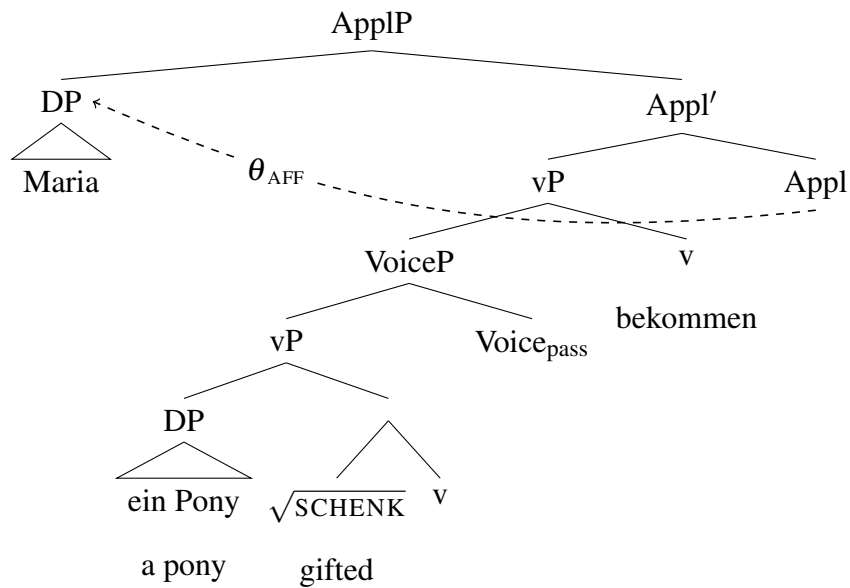
In this final section, I make some suggestions as to the properties that an analysis of *bekommen+participle* should possess, taking the findings of the preceding sections regarding the different components of the structure into account. In doing so, I point to open questions, especially as they pertain to discussions of argument structure more generally.

5.1 Arguments and thematic roles

I take the facts to support an analysis that is syntactically along the lines of Oya (2015), who in turn builds on Sigurðsson & Wood's (2012) analysis of Icelandic. Oya treats *bekommen* as a light verb, taking a small verbal complement to form *bekommen+participle*. *bekommen* either spells out *v* in the context of Appl, or a complex head consisting of both *v* and Appl (cf. Oya 2015, Sigurðsson & Wood 2012).⁵ The subject is introduced as an applied argument of *bekommen*.

⁵Following Sigurðsson & Wood, Oya assumes that Appl is merged below the higher *v*, but moves up to form a complex head with it.

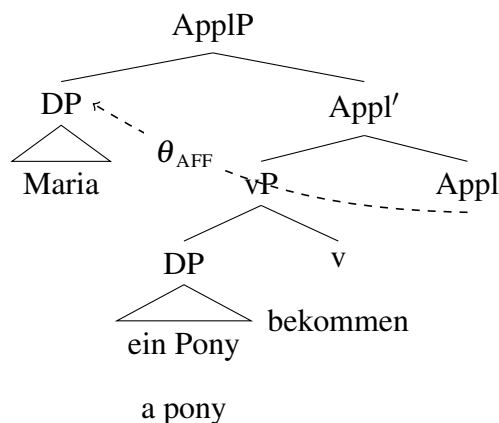
(37)



The accusative object is merged as the complement of the embedded verb, but interpreted as the theme of the complex transfer event. I diverge from Oya in not attempting to unify the applicative component of the analysis with an analysis of German *haben* ('have'). While I agree with Oya (and McIntyre 2006) that both involve applicative heads (as do high datives), that analysis ultimately does not explain why the heads from the Appl_{HAVE} family are spelled out as *haben* or *bekommen* respectively (considering that a difference in aktionsart cannot be the whole story, see next subsection).

Turning to *bekommen* by itself, our discussion suggests that the structure strongly parallels *bekommen+participle*, but *bekommen* takes a DP complement directly.

(38)



Many of the differences and similarities between *bekommen* and *bekommen+participle*

follow from this type of analysis fairly straightforwardly: the lack of an embedded passive VoiceP accounts for the lack of agentive *von*-phrases and the obligatory surface-subject orientation of modifiers. The accusative object is interpreted as the theme of *bekommen* itself and therefore obligatorily a theme of concrete transfer. The interpretation of *bekommen* itself and of the subject are more interesting and more subtle. If we assume, as indicated above, that *bekommen* has a bleached denotation and does not encode specifics such as the direction of transfer for more permissive speakers, we need to assume either that it is strengthened in the absence of a participle, such that the event comes to be construed as a positive transfer event, or we could claim that *bekommen* appears with the weaker denotation only when it takes a verbal complement.

As for the interpretative properties of the subject, our analysis predicts that they should be the same across the two syntactic contexts, in particular, the subject is *affected* by the event in some way. As we have seen, this prediction is clearly correct for recipient-like and experiencer-like subjects (recall (18)). The sticking point is negative transfer, and in particular whether the analysis predicts that (38) should have an interpretation in which Maria is *negatively* affected by the transfer of a pony. If, however, *bekommen* itself is narrowly interpreted as associated with a positive transfer event in this syntactic context, as discussed immediately above, this concern vanishes, as the direction of transfer determines the ways in which the subject can be affected by it. This shows how the intricate link between events and how they are related to their participants shapes discussions of argument structure, in addition to narrower discussions of thematic role assignment.

On this account, there is no movement relationship between dative indirect objects and nominative subjects, and thus no dative-nominative alternation in German. A consequence is that the picture of the German is simplified: an account in terms of inherent case (cf. McFadden 2006, McIntyre 2006 a.o.) is not challenged by *bekommen*+*participle* (contra Wegener 1991, Fanselow 1987, 2000, Alexiadou et al. 2014 a.o.). The link between datives and *bekommen*-subjects emerges as indirect on this view: both subjects of *bekommen* and datives in German are introduced as affected applicatives, and so indepen-

dently denote recipients, possessors, beneficiaries etc., roles that are necessarily subject to similar restrictions. This follows if the applicative head that introduces (some) dative arguments is closely related in some way to the head that introduces subjects with *bekommen* (see also McIntyre 2005, 2006, Sigurðsson & Wood 2012, Oya 2015, Lee-Schoenfeld & Twiner 2020). The difference is in case assignment itself – the *bekommen*-subjects crucially receive nominative case, not dative.

5.2 Event-structure and the depictive reading

As a final point, I would like to return briefly to the interpretation of the complex event in *bekommen+participle* and how it relates to the *depictive* reading discussed in Section 2. As mentioned there, the literature has typically appealed to a distinction in category, arguing that the participle is adjectival in the structure that receives the depictive reading, and verbal in the putative passive (Reis 1985, Abraham 2005, Oya 2015). This is not implausible, but in itself does not explain why the acceptability of *bekommen+participle* is reduced (and, for some speakers, ungrammaticality results) exactly in contexts where the depictive reading is not straightforwardly available, cf. (39):

- (39) a. dass Laura ihre Gitarre gestohlen bekommt
 that Laura.NOM her guitar.ACC stolen **RECEIVES**
 ‘that Laura had her guitar stolen’ privative transfer
- b. dass wir geholfen bekommen
 that we helped **RECEIVE**
 ‘that we are being helped’ monotransitive

In other words, a difference in category does not explain why the verbal and adjectival participle would not both be available with their associated readings across the board, except where they are independently ruled out. Note in particular that in (39a), the depictive reading does not merely *diverge* from the putative passive reading, but is entirely unavailable, presumably because *gestohlen* ‘stolen’ makes a poor depictive. This opens up the possibility that the difference between the depictive and passive readings really is not quite as robust as it has been made out to be, and instead merely reflects different in-

interpretative possibilities of the participle itself and associated state denotations in a given syntactic context.

The question that arises is whether the participle is simply interpreted as holding of the object or as modifying the transfer event, either by specifying the result state or the manner of transfer, depending on the aspectual properties of the transfer event. The intuition that aspectual properties of the complex event play a role in the variation and should feature in the analysis of *bekommen+participle* is present in e.g. Abraham (2005), who argues that *bekommen* is telic and imposes telicity on *bekommen+participle*, except with embedded monotransitive verb, and in Oya (2015), who considers but ultimately rejects the idea that *bekommen* acts as an inchoative version of *haben* (have) in *bekommen+participle*. While I have to leave a full analysis of the event structure in *bekommen+participle* to future work, note that nothing about the syntactic structure proposed above in principle rules out either type of orientation of the participles, also see Geuder (2000) on the difficulties in distinguishing event-oriented manner adverbs and depictives systematically.

5.3 Conclusions and Open Questions

In this paper, the different structural components of German *bekommen+participle* have been investigated separately. I have argued that there are significant challenges to the consensus view of the structure as an indirect object passive in German, both empirically and theoretically. On the empirical side, the paper takes steps to systematize some of the regional and inter-speaker variation that is found with respect to the participles that can be embedded under *bekommen*. I argue that the variation is too systematic for the data to be characterized as the kind of idiosyncratic exceptions that are frequently found in argument structure alternations. Instead, even the more permissive speakers were argued to require a construal of the complex event as a transfer event, with variation in the degree of abstraction that different speakers allow. The subject in *bekommen+participle* is argued to be subject to an *affectedness* restriction that is also found with *bekommen* by itself. This restriction is argued to be the reason for the affinity between *bekommen*-subjects and

dative-marked arguments, which also typically express affected entities. This calls into question the necessity of postulating a movement dependency between the two argument positions, which I showed to be independently unsupported. As for the presence of a passive VoiceP in the complement, I show that the diagnostics, carefully applied, do support this component of a ‘passive’ analysis.

As such, the case study is in line with other recent work on argument structure (Sigurðsson & Wood 2021, Legate 2021, Biggs & Embick 2022 a.m.o.) in demonstrating the need to take initially conflicting evidence seriously, as well as the promise of such conflicts resolving when the various components of the analysis are evaluated separately. By re-centering our understanding on the contribution of the light verb *bekommen* in particular, we advance the possibility of better understanding the prevalence of Voice alternation involving verbs of transfer cross-linguistically, and the degree to which their influence on the event structure of the complex predicate shapes possible analyses.

With respect to the proposed applicative analysis (along the lines of Sigurðsson & Wood 2012, Oya 2015) in this section, some open questions of great interest remain, especially with respect to how precisely the arguments are related to the complex event. There are also empirical questions that could receive further scrutiny, for instance in whether the variation between *bekommen* and *kriegen* as the light verb in this structure is purely externally conditioned, e.g. by region and register (cf. Eroms 2000, Lenz 2013), or whether some speakers impose different conditions for the two grammar-internally.

Finally, we have seen that the case study may also speak to the analysis of participles in German more generally, in the sense that it represents a challenge to a clear division between object-oriented depictives and event-oriented verbal participles.

References

Abraham, Werner (2005): *Deutsche Syntax im Sprachvergleich. Grundlegung einer typologischen Syntax des Deutschen*. Stauffenberg, Tübingen.

- Alexiadou, Artemis, Elena Anagnostopoulou and Christina Sevdali (2014): ‘Opaque and transparent datives, and how they behave in passives’, *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* **17**, 1–34.
- Bader, Markus (2012): ‘The German bekommen passive: A case study on frequency and grammaticality’, *Linguistische Berichte* **231**, 249–299.
- Bader, Markus and Jana Häussler (2013): How much bekommen is there in the German bekommen passive. In: A. Alexiadou and F. Schäfer, eds, *Non-canonical passives*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, pp. 115–140.
- Beavers, John (2011): ‘On affectedness’, *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* **29**, 335–370.
- Biggs, Alison and David Embick (2022): ‘On the Event-Structural Properties of the English Get-Passive’, *Linguistic Inquiry* **53**, 211–254.
- Bosse, Solveig Jana (2011): The syntax and semantics of applicative arguments. PhD thesis, University of Delaware.
- Cook, Philippa (2006): The datives that aren’t born equal: Beneficiaries and the dative passive. In: D. Hole, A. Meinunger and W. Abraham, eds, *Datives and other cases*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, pp. 141–184.
- Cuervo, María (2003): Datives at large. PhD thesis, MIT, Cambridge, MA.
- Diedrichsen, Elke (2012): ‘What you give what you GET? On reanalysis, semantic extension and functional motivation with the German bekommen-passive construction’, *Linguistics* **50**, 1163–1204.
- Eroms, Hans-Werner (2000): *Syntax der deutschen Sprache*. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Fanselow, Gisbert (1987): *Konfiguralität*. Narr, Tübingen.

- Fanselow, Gisbert (2000): Optimal exceptions. *In*: B. Stiebels and D. Wunderlich, eds, *The lexicon in focus*. Akademie Verlag, Berlin, pp. 173–209.
- Haider, Hubert (1984): ‘Mona Lisa lächelt stumm - Über das sogenannte deutsche ‘Rezipientenpassiv’’, *Linguistische Berichte* **89**, 32–42.
- Haider, Hubert (1986): ‘Fehlende Argumente: vom Passiv zu kohärenten Infinitiven’, *Linguistische Berichte* **101**, 3–33.
- Haider, Hubert (2001): Heads and selection. *In*: N. Corver and H. van Riemsdijk, eds, *Semi-lexical categories: The function of content words and the content of function words*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 67–96.
- Harley, Heidi (2002): ‘Possession and the double object construction’, *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* **2**, 31–70.
- Jackendoff, Ray (1972): *Semantic interpretation in generative grammar*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Lee-Schoenfeld, Vera (2006): ‘German Possessor Datives: Raised and Affected’, *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* **9**, 101–142.
- Lee-Schoenfeld, Vera (2018): Passivization of German double-object constructions: Theory and usage. *In*: D. R. Jason Merchant, Line Mikkelsen and K. Sasaki, eds, *A Reasonable Way to Proceed: Essays in Honor of Jim McCloskey*. pp. 157–166.
- Lee-Schoenfeld, Vera and Nicholas Twiner (2020): ‘German passives and English benefactives: The need for non-canonical accusative case’, *Nordlyd* **44**, 53–68.
- Legate, Julie Anne (2021): ‘Nancanonical Passives: A Typology of Voice in an Impoverished Universal Grammar’, *Annual Review of Linguistics* **7**, 157–176.
- Leirbukt, Oddleif (1997): *Untersuchungen zum ‘bekommen’-Passiv im heutigen Deutsch*. Niemeyer, Tübingen.

- Lenz, Alexandra (2013): Three "competing" auxiliaries of a non-canonical passive - On the German GET passive and its auxiliaries. In: A. Alexiadou and F. Schäfer, eds, *Non-canonical passives*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, pp. 63–95.
- Li, Yen-Hui Audrey (2017): Chinese Ba. In: M. Everaert and H. C. van Riemsdijk, eds, *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Syntax*. John Wiley & Sons.
- McFadden, Thomas (2006): German inherent datives and argument structure. In: D. Hole, A. Meinunger and W. Abraham, eds, *Datives and other cases*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, pp. 49–79.
- McIntyre, Andrew (2005): 'The semantic and syntactic decomposition of get: an interaction between verb meaning and particle placement', *Journal of Semantics* **22**, 401–438.
- McIntyre, Andrew (2006): The interpretation of German datives and English have. In: D. Hole, A. Meinunger and W. Abraham, eds, *Datives and other cases*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam, pp. 185–213.
- Oya, Toshiaki (2015): 'Das Rezipientenpassiv als Applikativkonstruktion', *Linguistische Berichte* **243**, 295–329.
- Pittner, Karin (2011): Kriegen als resultatives Hilfsverb. In: *Aktuelle Probleme der Germanistik und Romanistik*. pp. 185–200.
- Pylkkänen, Liina (2008): *Introducing arguments*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Reis, Marga (1976): 'Zum grammatischen Status der Hilfsverben', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur* **98**, 64–82.
- Reis, Marga (1985): 'Mona Lisa kriegt zuviel', *Linguistische Berichte* **96**, 140–155.
- Richards, Norvin (2001): 'An idiomatic argument for lexical decomposition', *Linguistic Inquiry* **32**, 183–192.

Sigurðsson, Einar Freyr and Jim Wood (2012): ‘Case alternations in Icelandic get-passives’, *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* **35**, 269–312.

Sigurðsson, Einar Freyr and Jim Wood (2021): ‘On the Implicit Argument of Icelandic Indirect Causatives’, *Linguistic Inquiry* **52**, 579–625.

Wegener, Heide (1985): ‘Er bekommt widersprochen - Argumente für die Existenz eines Dativpassivs im Deutschen’, *Linguistische Berichte* **96**, 127–139.

Wegener, Heide (1991): Der Dativ - ein struktureller Kasus?. In: G. Fanselow and S. Felix, eds, *Strukturen und Merkmale syntaktischer Kategorien*. Narr, Tübingen, pp. 70–103.