ON THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GET-PASSIVE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GRAMMATICALIZATION

SHOKO HONDA
Nagoya University

This paper aims to clarify the origin and development of the get-passive in the history of English, and account for the process of its development in terms of the grammaticalization of get. It is proposed that the origin of the get-passive is “inchoative get + predicative adjective,” based on empirical data from historical corpora. After establishing the exact path of the development of the get-passive, it is shown to be neatly captured in terms of the grammaticalization of get from a lexical verb to a light verb, in accordance with the principle of Late Merge proposed by Gelderen (2004).*

Keywords: get-passive, inchoative get, grammaticalization, Late Merge, light verb

1. Introduction

As is well known, the get-passive behaves differently from the be-passive in some respects. For example, the referent of its subject is often responsible for the event denoted by the passive participle, as illustrated in (1).

(1) a. He was shot by the riot police.
   b. He got shot by the riot police. (Toyota (2008: 156))

Both sentences mean that the riot police shot someone, but (1a) has the possible reading that the riot police deliberately took a shot at him, whereas (1b) has the most normal interpretation that he bore some responsibility for

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1 Here are the historical periods of English generally assumed: Old English (OE: 450–1100), Middle English (ME: 1100–1500), Modern English (ModE: 1500–1900) (Early Modern English (EModE: 1500–1700), Late Modern English (LModE: 1700–1900)), and Present-day English (PE: 1900–).
the shooting. This difference can be illustrated more clearly by the following examples with the agent-oriented adverbial on purpose. It modifies the implicit agent in the be-passive, but the surface subject in the get-passive: the referent of the subject in the get-passive is agentive and hence takes on the responsibility for the event expressed by the passive participle.

(2) a. Mary was shot on purpose.
   b. Mary got shot on purpose. (Lakoff (1971: 156))

Several scholars have argued that such peculiarities of the get-passive follow from its origin and development, which are different from those of the be-passive. Their approaches are classified broadly into two types: one is that the origin of the get-passive is the get-causative, while the other is that its origin is “inchoative get + predicative adjective.” Along the lines of the latter approach, this paper investigates the origin and development of the get-passive by conducting some surveys based on historical corpora, arguing for the grammaticalization of get from a lexical verb generated in V to a light verb generated in v.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 briefly reviews three recent studies on the origin and development of the get-passive and points out some problems with them. Section 3 shows the data on the origin and development of the get-passive from historical corpora. Section 4 presents a syntactic analysis of the development of the get-passive in terms of the grammaticalization of get. Section 5 is the conclusion of this paper.

2. Previous Studies on the Origin and Development of the Get-Passive

2.1. Toyota (2008)

Along the lines of Givón and Yang (1994), Toyota (2008) argues that the origin of the get-passive is the form “causative get + oneself + passive participle.” He assumes that there are three stages in the development of the get-passive, where get takes passive participles as its complements, regardless of whether the latter are verbal or adjectival. On the other hand, the term “passive get” refers to instances of get with verbal passive participles, distinguished from “inchoative get” which takes predicative adjectives, including adjectival passive participles. See the discussion after section 2.2 for more detailed information.
get-passive, as shown in (3).4

(3)  Stage IV: I cannot get such sum confiscated. (from 1500 onwards)

   causative[get causee[such sum] GOAL[confiscated]]

Stage V: I got myself disliked.

   causative[get causee[myself] GOAL[disliked]]

Stage VI: I got involved with the girl.

   passive[get GOAL[involved with the girl]]

(cf. Toyota (2008: 180–181))

He points out that passive participles started to appear in the get-causative and gained in frequency around 1500–1600, in Stage IV. In Stage V, the direct object was sometimes realized as a reflexive pronoun in -self, and the subject was still in control of the action denoted by the passive participle or was at least responsible for it. However, the subject’s control became weakened, so that it was only responsible for the action denoted by the passive participle, and oneself began to be omitted, yielding the get-passive in Stage VI. Therefore, he argues that “causative get + oneself + passive participle” is the origin of the get-passive, and attributes the subject’s responsibility in the get-passive (see (1) and (2)) to the fact that its origin, namely “causative get + oneself + passive participle,” has the same property.

Toyota’s (2008) analysis seems to have three major problems. First, he does not discuss what caused the changes in (3), and therefore (3) only describes the development of the get-passive. Second, it is difficult to judge whether (3) is valid even as a descriptive statement, because he does not specify the periods of Stages V and VI. Third, he does not distinguish between adjectival and verbal passive participles, so he fails to clarify the exact path of the development of the get-passive.

2.2. Fleisher (2006)

Fleisher (2006) argues that the origin of the get-passive is the form “inchoative get + predicative adjective.” He assumes that the process in the

4 Before the stages in (3), Toyota (2008) assumes the following three stages in the development of causative get.

(i) Stage I: He gets her a present. (from 1300 onwards)

   non-causative[get beneficiary[her] theme[a present]]

Stage II: He gets her some words to say. (from 1450 onwards)

   non-causative/causative[get beneficiary/causee[her] theme[some words GOAL[to say]]]

Stage III: He gets her to say some words. (from 1600 onwards)

   causative[get causee[her] GOAL[to say theme[some words]]]

(cf. Toyota (2008: 180))
development of the get-passive from “inchoative get + predicative adjective” includes at least two stages. In Stage I, prior to 1760, passive participles occurring as complements to get were restricted almost entirely to those that could be interpreted as adjectives. Around 1760, this restriction was dropped, and verbal passive participles began to appear as complements to get in Stage II.

Then, Fleisher suggests that the change from inchoative get to passive get involves two types of reanalysis: morphosyntactic reanalysis and event-structural reanalysis, as shown in (4) and (5), respectively.

(4) Morphosyntactic Reanalysis
a. Stage I (prior to 1760)
   Inchoative get Hei got [AP ti [A′ acquainted with them]]

b. Stage II (after 1760)
   Passive get Hei got [VP acquainted ti with them]

(5) Event-structural Reanalysis
a. Stage I (prior to 1760)
   Inchoative get got [AP ti [A′ acquainted with them]]
   \[\begin{array}{c}
   \text{ONSET} \\
   \text{STATE} \\
   \text{TELIC EVENTUALITY}
   \end{array}\]

b. Stage II (after 1760)
   Passive get got [VP acquainted ti …]]
   \[\begin{array}{c}
   \text{ONSET} \\
   \text{STATE} \\
   \text{TELIC EVENTUALITY}
   \end{array}\]

As for the morphosyntactic reanalysis in (4), in Stage I, inchoative get is a raising verb taking an AP complement and the external argument of the adjectival passive participle raises to the matrix subject position. On the other hand, in Stage II, the complement to get is reanalyzed as VP and the internal argument of the verbal passive participle raises to the matrix subject position. Turning to the event-structural reanalysis in (5), the onset and the state comprising the telic eventuality are denoted by inchoative get and the adjectival passive participle, respectively, in Stage I, whereas both of these event-structural elements are denoted by the verbal passive participle after the change from inchoative get to passive get in Stage II. Notice that the former reanalysis depends on the syntactic ambiguity on the status of pas-
sive participles, while the latter reanalysis depends on the semantic ambiguity on the loci of ONSET and STATE.

One of the remarkable features in Fleisher’s (2006) analysis is that it makes a distinction between adjectival and verbal passive participles, on the basis of which he argues that the origin of the get-passive is “inchoative get + predicative adjective.” As we will see below, this paper partly concurs with his analysis, but there are at least two problems with it. First, he does not make explicit when get-passives with adjectival passive participles appeared in their development from “inchoative get + predicative adjective.” Second, he provides no motivation for the morphosyntactic reanalysis and event-structural reanalysis involved in the development of the get-passive. That is, he only assumes that the two types of reanalysis depend on the syntactic and semantic ambiguity as mentioned above; he does not discuss why the latter forced the change from inchoative get to passive get.

2.3. Hundt (2001)

Based on a detailed survey using corpus data, Hundt (2001) assumes that the origin of the get-passive is the causative passive (“causative get + object + passive participle”), arguing for the grammaticalization of get.5 According to her survey, the causative passive decreased sharply between 1800 and 1859, when the frequency of the get-passive gradually increased, which leads her to assume that the grammaticalization of causative get is involved in the development of the get-passive from the causative passive.

Hundt’s (2001) analysis is similar to the one presented in the following sections, in that it is a corpus-based study focusing on the grammaticalization of get, but there are at least three problems with it. First, she provides no motivation for the grammaticalization of get. Second, she does not show how the grammaticalization of get proceeded with the relevant structural change(s) from the causative passive to the get-passive. Third, as for the data of the get-passive in ModE, she does not pay attention to the categorial status of passive participles, so she fails to reveal the exact path of the development of the get-passive.

3. Data from Historical Corpora

The previous section reviewed Toyota’s (2008), Fleisher’s (2006), and

5 Her survey is based on the following five corpora: ARCHER for ModE, as well as Brown, LOB, Frown, and FLOB for PE.
Hundt’s (2001) analyses of the origin and development of the get-passive, pointing out empirical as well as conceptual problems with them. In order to overcome their empirical problems, it is necessary to clarify the whole path of the development of the get-passive, paying attention to the distinction between adjectival and verbal passive participles. In addition, the three authors argue for the different origins of the get-passive, so it must be determined which of the three is a more likely candidate for its origin, “causative get + oneself + passive participle,” “inchoative get + predicative adjective,” or “causative get + object + passive participle.”

Therefore, this section investigates the origin and development of the get-passive based on the data from The Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Early Modern English (PPCEME) and The Corpus of Late Modern English Texts (CLMET). It focuses on the categorial status of passive participles as complements to get, as well as the frequency of the get-passive and related constructions.

3.1. The Category of Passive Participles in the Get-Passive

As is obvious from the review of Fleisher (2006) in section 2.2, the category of passive participles is ambiguous between verb and adjective in the get-passive, and the distinction is closely related to its interpretation. For example, the sentence in (6) has two readings: one is the reading in which an implicit agent made John involved in the project, while the other is the reading in which John simply became involved in the project without reference to an implicit agent. Only in the former reading can we say that the sentence involves passive get taking a verbal passive participle, while the latter reading instantiates inchoative get taking an adjectival passive participle.

(6) John got involved in the project very quickly.

Therefore, our first task is to examine the nature of passive participles in the data of get-passives collected from PPCEME and CLMET, in order to establish when get-passives with adjectival/verbal passive participles appeared in the history of English. In determining the categorial status of passive participles, one of Wasow’s (1977) tests is adopted: only adjectival passive participles can appear as complements to certain copular verbs, including act, become, look, remain, seem, and sound, as shown in (7).

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6 The periodization of PPCEME and CLMET is E1 (1500–1569), E2 (1570–1639), E3 (1640–1710), L1 (1710–1780), L2 (1780–1850), and L3 (1850–1920).
(7) a. John remained {elated / faithful to anarchism during the year’s repression}.
    b. John seemed {annoyed at us / vague about his future plans}.
    c. John sounded {convinced to run / defensive}.

(cf. Wasow (1977: 339))

I have checked whether instances of passive participles found in the data of get-passives in PPCEME and CLMET are also attested as complements to these copular verbs in the same corpora. If so, they are regarded as adjectival passive participles or ambiguous passive participles which can be either adjectival or verbal like involved in (6). In addition, I have also checked whether passive participles found in the data of get-passives in PPCEME and CLMET are listed as adjective and/or verb in The Oxford English Dictionary (OED). If a passive participle is listed only as verb, it is assumed to be a verbal passive participle; similarly, the one listed only as adjective is classified as an adjectival passive participle. Furthermore, if a passive participle is listed as both adjective and verb and both usages are dated before the relevant example in PPCEME and CLMET, it is assumed to be an ambiguous passive participle. On the other hand, if either of the two usages, say the verbal usage, is dated after the relevant example in PPCEME and CLMET, it is regarded as an adjectival passive participle, because the verbal usage had not yet been established by the time it was attested. As a result, I have obtained the following classification of passive participles in the data of get-passives found in PPCEME and CLMET.

(8) Adjectival passive participles
    rid of, drunk, dressed, advanced, entangled, tired (of), interested, born

Verbal passive participles
    introduced, delivered, paid, abolished, squeezed, decreed, punished, done, promoted, uttered, gathered, settled, cut, drowned, called (up), floored, carried, packed, divorced, taken, smashed, mixed up, left, saved, converted

Ambiguous passive participles
    acquainted (with), married, engaged, seated, fixed, excited, melted, frightened, accustomed, involved, confused, caught, upset, lost

With this in mind, let us now turn to the frequency data of the get-
passive in PPCEME and CLMET. First, Tables 1 and 2 show the overall frequency of the get-passive, followed by some examples from each period.

Table 1  Frequency of the get-passive in PPCEME (per 1,000,000 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E1</th>
<th>E2</th>
<th>E3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Frequency of the get-passive in CLMET (per 1,000,000 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
<th>L3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>65.22</td>
<td>139.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(9) (…) for when this Fellow of mine gets drunk, he minds nothing.
   (FAROUHAR-E3-H, 8.283)
(10) (…) and then they go together to the church, where they give
good advice to young nymphs and swains to get married as fast
as you can. (goldsmith 1766 the vicar of wakefield.txt: L1)
(11) Because, when men get excited, they know not what they do.
   (gaskell 1848 mary barton.txt: L2)
(12) She got saved, and our lasses prayed for him to get work.
   (booth 1890 in darkness england and the way out.txt: L3)

Next, Tables 3 and 4 show the frequency of each type of passive partici-
ple after E3, when the get-passive became first attested. Figure 1 is a
graph of Table 4, showing the frequency in LModE after verbal passive par-
ticiples appeared in the get-passive.

Table 3  Frequency of the three types of passive participles in the
get-passive in PPCEME (per 1,000,000 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjectival passive participles</td>
<td>10.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal passive participles</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous passive participles</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4  Frequency of the three types of passive participles in the get-
passive in CLMET (per 1,000,000 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
<th>L3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjectival passive participles</td>
<td>18.76</td>
<td>31.21</td>
<td>50.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal passive participles</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>31.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous passive participles</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>27.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ON THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE *GET*-PASSIVE

Figure 1  Frequency of the three types of passive participles in the *get*-passive in CLMET (per 1,000,000 words)

![Graph showing frequency of passive participles](image)

The (a) examples in (13)–(15) illustrate the earliest occurrence with each type of passive participle.

(13)  adjectival passive participle
   a. (…) because he intended nothing by them but to *get rid of* importunity, and to silence all further pressing upon him.
      (BURNETCHA-E3-H, 1.1, 166.9: E3)
   b. (…) for when this Fellow of mine *gets drunk*, he minds nothing.
      (FAROUHAR-E3-H, 8.283)

(14)  ambiguous passive participle
   a. I would have you endevor to *get acquainted with* Monsieur de Maupertuis, (…).
      (chesterfield 1746–71 letters to his son.txt: L1)
   b. Poor Lady A.F.—has not *got married*.
      (byron 1810–13 letter 1810–1813.txt: L2)

(15)  verbal passive participle
   a. (…) you should *get introduced*.
      (chesterfield 1746–71 letters to his son.txt: L1)
   b. (…) Many people with worse stories *get called on*,” (…)
      (galsworthy 1904 the island pharisees.txt: L3)

It is observed from these results that adjectival passive participles were the first to appear in the *get*-passive; (13a) is from the text which belongs

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7 In fact, there is one example in E3 of *get* followed by *acquainted*, which is listed as an example of ambiguous passive participle in (8), but this example is regarded as involving *acquainted* as an adjectival passive participle, because it was not until LModE that *acquainted* acquired its verbal usage, according to the OED.
to E3, written between 1683 and 1713. This implies that it is unlikely that the origin of the get-passive is the get-causative as Toyota (2008) and Hundt (2001) claim, because causative get typically takes verbal passive participles as its complements. Instead, the hypothesis suggested by Fleisher (2006) will be supported that the origin of the get-passive is “inchoative get + predicative adjective”: the get-passive would have been derived by inserting adjectival passive participles as complements to inchoative get taking predicative adjectives.

Moreover, the investigation in this section, which distinguishes the three types of passive participles as in (8), has revealed the exact path of the development of the get-passive, overcoming the problem with all the previous studies pointed out in section 2.2. As just mentioned, get-passives first appeared with adjectival passive participles in E3 (between 1683 and 1713, to be more precise). Then, those with ambiguous passive participles began to be attested in L1; (14a) is from the text written between 1746 and 1771. The same text contains the earliest example of get-passives with verbal passive participles in (15a). This will indicate that “inchoative get + adjectival passive participle” was reanalyzed as “passive get + verbal passive participle” in this period, the precise mechanism of which will be discussed in section 4, paying attention to the role of ambiguous passive participles.

3.2. The Frequency of the Get-Passive and Related Constructions

As we saw in the previous section, the get-passive became first attested with adjectival passive participles in E3, which supports the hypothesis that its origin is “inchoative get + predicative adjective,” but not the get-causative that typically involves verbal passive participles. In order to provide further support for this hypothesis, I have investigated the frequency of the get-passive and some constructions that have been argued to be its direct origin in the literature, including those with inchoative get and causative get. The results of this investigation are summarized in the following tables and figures; Figures 2 and 3 are graphs of Tables 5 and 6, respectively.

8 Therefore, this investigation excludes constructions with get meaning ‘obtain,’ ‘beget,’ or ‘move.’ See Yonekura (1999) for the development of other usages of get than those discussed in this paper.
Table 5  Frequency of constructions with *get* in PPCEME
(per 1,000,000 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E1</th>
<th>E2</th>
<th>E3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>get</em>-passive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inchoative <em>get</em></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>19.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ predicative adjective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causative <em>get</em></td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ <em>oneself</em> + passive participle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causative <em>get</em></td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>24.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ object + passive participle</td>
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</table>

Table 6  Frequency of constructions with *get* in CLMET
(per 1,000,000 words)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L2</th>
<th>L3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>get</em>-passive</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>65.22</td>
<td>139.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inchoative <em>get</em></td>
<td>31.60</td>
<td>76.09</td>
<td>150.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ predicative adjective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causative <em>get</em></td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>10.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ <em>oneself</em> + passive participle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causative <em>get</em></td>
<td>15.80</td>
<td>27.70</td>
<td>38.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ object + passive participle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2  Frequency of constructions with *get* in PPCEME
(per 1,000,000 words)
It is observed that the get-passive appeared a little later than “inchoative get + predicative adjective,” which was first attested in E2, and the distribution of the two constructions is quite parallel in that they both increased rapidly in LModE. By contrast, no such parallelism is found between the distribution of the get-passive and that of the two constructions with causative get. Especially, it should be noted that “causative get + oneself + passive participle” was extremely rare in E3 and L1, when the get-passive was being established, which would imply that the former is not related to the origin of the get-passive, contrary to Toyota’s (2008) claim. Although it is quite difficult to prove the relevance of frequency data to the origin of a construction, it would follow from the above arguments, together with the data in the previous section, that “inchoative get + predicative adjective” is a more likely candidate of the origin of the get-passive than the get-causative. Then, a plausible scenario would be that the get-passive emerged by inserting adjectival passive participles as complements to inchoative get, which had already acquired the property of selecting predicative adjectives.


This section provides a syntactic analysis of the development of the get-passive revealed by the investigations in section 3, in terms of the grammaticalization of get. It is argued that get was grammaticalized from a lexical verb generated in V to a light verb generated in v during LModE, which was driven by the principle of Late Merge proposed by Gelderen (2004).
As discussed in section 3, this paper basically follows Fleisher (2006) in assuming that the origin of the get-passive is “inchoative get + predica-
tive adjective” and its earliest examples involve adjectival passive partici-
bles. Therefore, when the get-passive was first attested in E3, its structure 
will be as in (16).

\[
\begin{array}{c}
(16) \\
\text{TP} \\
\text{DP}_1 \quad \text{T'} \\
\text{T} \quad \text{VP} \\
\text{[+EPP]} \\
\text{V} \quad \text{AP} \\
\text{DP}_1 \quad \text{A'} \\
\text{get} \quad t_i \quad \text{drunk}
\end{array}
\]

In (16), get, which is generated in V as a lexical verb, retains its inchoative 
meaning, with the adjectival passive participle expressing the resultant state 
of the matrix subject.

Then, examples of get-passives with ambiguous passive participles began 
to be attested in L1 (see Table 4 and Figure 1). This fact is overlooked 
by Fleisher (2006) because he only classifies passive participles into two 
types, adjectival and verbal passive participles. Paying special attention 
to get-passives with ambiguous passive participles, this paper assumes that 
they played an important role in the grammaticalization of get, as well as 
the reanalysis of adjectival passive participles as verbal passive participles, 
because their structure is ambiguous between (17a) and (17b). The former 
is identical with the structure in (16), while the latter is the structure of get-
passives with verbal passive participles proposed here, where get is a light 
verb generated in v and the passive participle is a category of V taking an 
internal argument.⁹

⁹ See below for the assumption that v has the EPP feature that triggers raising of the 
internal argument to [Spec, vP] on its way to [Spec, TP].
According to Fleisher (2006), verbal passive participles express both the inchoative and resultative meanings of the *get*-passive, so it seems plausible to assume that passive *get* has lost an inchoative meaning as a result of semantic bleaching (see (5)). This will support the view embodied in the structure (17b) that *get* has been grammaticalized into a light verb generated in \(v\), distinguished from a lexical verb generated in \(V\).\(^{10}\)

If the above arguments are on the right track, it would be conjectured that *get*-passives with ambiguous passive participles were the initial locus of the grammaticalization of *get* from a lexical verb to a light verb, as well as the reanalysis of adjectival passive participles as verbal passive participles. This would have made it possible that *get*-passives with verbal passive participles appeared in L1 and became firmly established during LModE, as we saw in Table 4 and Figure 1. The following is the structure of *get*-passives with verbal passive participles, which is identical with the structure in (17b).

\(^{10}\) See Alexiadou (2005) for a similar proposal that passive *get* is a light verb generated in \(v/Voice\). Gronemeyer (1999) also characterizes passive *get* as a “semi-grammaticalized” verb whose meaning is largely determined by its syntactic context.
An immediate question here is what the motivation of the grammaticalization of *get* is; recall that a similar problem was raised for Toyota’s (2008), Fleisher’s (2006), and Hundt’s (2001) analyses in section 2 concerning the causes of the changes they propose. The answer pursued here is that Late Merge, proposed by Gelderen (2004) as one of the universal economy principles, played an important role in driving the grammaticalization of *get*.

(Late Merge)

Merge as late as possible. (Gelderen (2004: 28))

The principle (19) indicates that it is more economical to wait as long as possible before merging than to merge early and then move. Chomsky (2000, 2001) also proposes a similar principle, what is called Merge over Move. Gelderen cites the well-known case of grammaticalization of modals as an instance of the change from a head to a higher head in accordance with the principle of Late Merge. In her analysis, the base-generated position of modals, which functioned as lexical verbs in OE and ME, changed from V to Asp(ect), and later to M(ood).

Returning now to the grammaticalization of *get*, it should be noticed that the present analysis is fully consistent with Late Merge in that the base-generated position of *get* changed from V to v, a functional head above VP. Therefore, the rise of “passive *get* + verbal passive participle” would be syntax-driven, with the concomitant change in the loci of the inchoative and resultative meanings of the *get*-passive. Of course, it is quite conceivable that the change in the categorial status of *get* is closely related to its semantic bleaching, with the two events proceeding in parallel in L1.

Apart from Gelderen (2004), an economy-based approach to grammaticalization is also advocated by Roberts and Roussou (2003), and it has become one of the influential programs for diachronic syntax and has succeeded in providing a syntactic account of a number of phenomena studied so far mainly from a semantic viewpoint. Thus, this paper contributes to this program by applying Late Merge to account for the development of the *get*-passive, thereby enhancing its explanatory power as well as increasing its empirical coverage.

Finally, the remainder of this section presents two consequences of the present analysis, both of which are related to the status of *get* as a light verb generated in v. First, recall from section 1 that the *get*-passive shows the property that its subject is responsible for the event denoted by the passive participle (see (1) and (2)). This property can be explained in terms of the assumption embodied in the structure (17b)/(18) that *get* is a light verb generated in v and the internal argument of V moves through Spec-vP...
to satisfy the EPP feature of \( v \). As for the functions of \( v \) in passives, this paper partly follows Osawa (2001), and assumes that it has an EPP feature and assigns a secondary theta-role (Agent) to Spec-\( \nu P \),\(^{11}\) though it does not take an external argument because of the lack of the ability to assign a primary theta-role.\(^{12}\) Then, the subject of the get-passive, which is assigned a primary theta-role (Theme) by V as its internal argument, moves through Spec-\( \nu P \) to satisfy the EPP feature of \( v \) and is assigned a secondary theta-role (Agent) by \( v \). Therefore, it is interpreted as a secondary agent that is responsible for the event denoted by the passive participle, thereby accounting for the subject’s responsibility in the get-passive.

Second, the present analysis provides a neat explanation of sentences like (20), which illustrate a number of differences between be-passives and get-passives.

(20) a. Negation, i.e., *He was not caught, but *He got not caught.
   b. Interrogative, i.e., *Was he caught?, but *Got he caught?
   c. Strandling by deletion of the verb, i.e., *He was caught and so was his friend, but *He got caught, and so got his friend.
   d. Position of adverbs, i.e., *He was never caught, but *He got never caught.
   e. Position of a quantifier, i.e., *The boys were all caught, but *The boys got all caught. (cf. Toyota (2008: 151))

These sentences indicate that get behaves as a lexical verb in the relevant respects unlike be. In the be-passive, be does not participate in either primary or secondary theta-role assignment, so it is generated outside \( \nu P \) and

\(^{11}\) Indeed, Osawa (2001) argues that \( \nu \) assigns a secondary theta-role (Agent) to Spec-\( \nu P \) in the be-passive, without taking the get-passive into consideration. However, recall from section 1 that the subject of the be-passive is typically not responsible for the event denoted by the passive participle. Moreover, when an agent-oriented adverbial occurs in the be-passive, it cannot be associated with the surface subject, but with the implicit agent, as illustrated in (2), indicating that the former cannot be interpreted as agentive. Therefore, this paper adopts the mechanism of secondary theta-role assignment proposed by Osawa (2001), but applies it only to the get-passive that has the property of the subject’s agentivity/responsibility.

\(^{12}\) Apart from (primary) theta-roles associated with the argument structure of a lexical item, some scholars assume secondary theta-roles to account for the agentivity of arguments that have already been assigned a primary theta-role. See Jaeggli and Hyams (1993) and Kume (2009) for the application of this assumption to “aspectual come/go” which requires an agentive subject; indeed, the analysis in the text has been inspired by Kume’s work, where it is argued that aspectual come/go is generated in \( \nu \) and assigns a secondary theta-role (Agent) to Spec-\( \nu P \). See also Roeper (1987) for the notion of “secondary agent.”
moves to T (then, to C in questions), exhibiting the same distribution as auxiliaries. On the other hand, given Pollock’s (1989) influential proposal that lexical verbs cannot move to T in PE because T must not be occupied by elements which assign a theta-role, it will follow that get cannot move to T (then, to C in questions) in the get-passive, because it is a light verb in v that assigns a secondary theta-role to Spec-vP. Although get has been grammaticalized into a light verb, it still behaves syntactically as a lexical verb rather than as an auxiliary, due to its property of assigning a secondary theta-role.

5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the origin and development of the get-passive in the history of English, based on the data from the two historical corpora, PPCEME and CLMET. Along the lines of Fleisher (2006), it was argued that the origin of the get-passive is “inchoative get + predicative adjective,” and therefore it originally involved adjectival passive participles as complements to get. Then, it was proposed that get-passives with verbal passive participles emerged via the grammaticalization of get from a lexical verb to a light verb, which was triggered by the principle of Late Merge proposed by Gelderen (2004).

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ON THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GET-PASSIVE

Department of English Linguistics
Graduate School of Letters
Nagoya University
Furo-cho, Chikusa-ku, Nagoya-shi
Aichi 464–8601
e-mail: honda.shoko@h.mbox.nagoya-u.ac.jp