International Scientific-Methodological Electronic Journal "Foreign Languages in Uzbekistan", 2025, vol. 11, No 1 (60), pp. 56-81
https://journal.fledu.uz
ISSN: 2181-8215 (online)

CONDITIONING FACTORS FOR THE CHOICE OF *GET*-PASSIVES IN ENGLISH: A CORPUS STUDY

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GET-PASSIVLARNI TANLASHNI BELGILOVCHI OMILLAR INGLIZ TILIDA: KORPUS TADQIQOTI

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ФАКТОРЫ, ОБУСЛОВЛИВАЮЩИЕ ВЫБОР GET-ПАССИВОВ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ: КОРПУСНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ

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For citation (iqtibos keltirish uchun, для цитирования):
Daiho Kitaoka. Conditioning factors for the choice of *get*-passives in english: a corpus study // O'zbekistonda xorijiy tillar. — 2025. — 11-jild, № 1. — B. 56-81.

https://doi.org/10.36078/1741330372

Received: December 18, 2024
Accepted: February 17, 2025
Published: February 20, 2025

Abstract. This paper is part of the ongoing research project concernin the syntax of passive construction in English. Passive construction notorious in both linguistics and education for its complex structure varied meanings and implications, and the presence of numerou comparable constructions. To tackle these challenges, the purpose this project is twofold. First, it contributes to a comparative study of th passive construction in English, Japanese, and other languages. Secon it contributes to pedagogy. To reach these aims, this paper uses variationist framework to analyze a corpus of English passives. It als extends to descriptive and generative frameworks. The present stud analyzes the English passives, specifically *be*-passives and *get*-passive in Quebec, Canada, to identify the conditioning factors influencing the selection. The tokens of the passive sentences are examined in terms their relations to age, sex, and social classes, as well as syntact properties (e.g., agentivity). It is proposed that the choice of *ge* passives is affected by three independent factors: age, the presence absence of a by-phrase, and the types of verbs used and how they a subcategorized and dynamic. Even though the corpus used in this stud is fairly small, it contributes to the field by looking at a type of passiv construction that has not been looked at much from different theoretic and descriptive angles. It also makes suggestions about how to do th research and what these findings mean for the form-meaning interface.
Keywords: passives; *get*-passives; *be*-passives; variationist approac syntax; English.

Annotatsiya. Bu maqola ingliz tilidagi passiv konstruksiya sintaksisig bag'ishlangan joriy tadqiqot loyihasining bir qismi hisoblanadi. Passi

konstruksiya lingvistika va til o‘qitish sohasida murakkab tuzilishi, tur
ma’no va ta’sirlari hamda ko‘plab o‘xshash konstruksiyalarnin
mavjudligi bilan mashhur. Bu muammolarni hal qilish uchun loyihac
ikki asosiy maqsad belgilangan. Birinchidan, ingliz, yapon va boshc
tillardagi passiv konstruksiyalarni taqqoslashga ko‘maklashish
Ikkinchidan, ingliz tilini o‘qitish metodikasini rivojlantirish. Ushb
maqsadlarga erishish uchun maqolada ingliz tilidagi passiv fe’ll
korpusini tahlil qilishda variativ yondashuv qo‘llaniladi. Tadqiq
natijalari tavsifiy va generativ tuzilmalarga ham tatbiq etiladi. Mazku
tadqiqotda Kanadaning Kvebek viloyatidagi ingliz tilidagi passi
shakllar, xususan, be-passives va get-passives konstruksiyala
o‘rganilib, ularning tanlanishiga ta’sir qiluvchi omillar aniqlanad
Passiv gaplardagi leksik birliklar yosh, jins, ijtimoiy tabaqalanis
hamda sintaktik xususiyatlar (masalan, agentivlik) nuqtayi nazarida
tahlil qilinadi. Get-passives tanlanishiga uchta mustaqil omil ta’s
ko‘rsatishi taxmin qilinadi: yosh omili; qo‘shimcha frazanin
mavjudligi yoki yo‘qligi; ishlatilgan fe’llarning turlari va ularnin
kichik toifalarga bo‘linishi, shuningdek, ushbu shaklda qanday dinam
o‘zgarishlar sodir bo‘lishi. Tadqiqot materiallarining hajmi cheklanga
bo‘lishiga qaramay, u ushbu yo‘nalishga ma’lum darajada hiss
qo‘shadi. Xususan, ilgari turli nazariy va tavsifiy jihatlar asosida ker
o‘rganilmagan passiv konstruksiya turini tahlil qiladi. Shuningde
maqolada ushbu tadqiqotning o‘tkazilishiga oid tavsiyalar va olinga
natijalarning shakl va ma’no o‘zaro aloqasini tushunishdagi ahamiya
haqida fikrlar bildiriladi.
Kalit so‘zlar: passivlar; get-passives; be-passives; variativ yondashu
sintaksis; ingliz tili.

Аннотация. Эта статья является частью текуще
исследовательского проекта, посвященного синтаксису пассивно
конструкции в английском языке. Пассивная конструкция извест
как в лингвистике, так и в преподавании своими сложным
структурами, разнообразными значениями и следствиями, а такж
наличием многочисленных сопоставимых конструкций. Дл
решения этих проблем у данного проекта две цели. Во-первых, с
способствует сравнительному изучению пассивной конструкции
английском, японском и других языках. Во-вторых, он содействуе
методике преподавания английского языка. Для достижения эти
целей в данной статье используется вариативный подход дл
анализа корпуса английских пассивных глаголов. Он такж
распространяется на описательные и генеративные структуры.
настоящем исследовании анализируются английские пассивы,
частности be-passives и get-passives, в Квебеке, Канада, дл
выявления факторов, влияющих на их выбор. Лексемы пассивны
предложений рассматриваются с точки зрения их связи
возрастом, полом и социальными классами, а такж
синтаксическими свойствами (например, агентивностью
Предполагается, что на выбор get-passives влияют тр
независимых фактора: возраст, наличие или отсутстви
дополнительной фразы и типы используемых глаголов, а также т
как они подразделяются на подкатегории и в какой степен
проявляется в них динамика. Несмотря на то что материа
используемый в данном исследовании, довольно мал, он внос
определенный вклад в эту область, рассматривая тип пассивно
конструкции, который практически не рассматривался с разны
теоретических и описательных точек зрения. В нем также даютс
предложения о том, как проводить исследование и что эт
результаты означают для взаимодействия формы и значения.

Ключевые слова: пассивы; get-passives; be-passive
вариационный подход; синтаксис; английский язык.

Introduction

Passive construction is one of the very first challenges for learners of a foreign language. Passives require certain alternations or transformations from a basic sentence structure, e.g., word order, verb forms, inserting an agent phrase (e.g., *by*-phrases), case marking, etc. Moreover, linguistically and pedagogically, passives have diverse varieties. For instance, Japanese has at least three types of passives, including direct, possessive, and adversity passives, which are all comparable to other constructions (e.g., benefactives, causatives) [Hoshi, 1999, Howard & Niyekawa-Howard, 1976, Kim, 2012, Kubo, 1992, Kuno 1973, Kuroda, 1979, Mihara, 1994, Mihara & Hiraiwa, 2004, Miyagawa, 1989, Shibatani, 1990]. It is a long-lasting mission to provide a thorough description of the constructions and to formalize them.

To achieve this long-term goal, this paper provides a corpus study of passives in English within a variationist framework [Labov, 1972, 1975; Labov et al., 1968]. The passive construction in English can be derived in two ways: (i) an auxiliary verb *be* followed by a past participle form of a verb, as in (1a); and (ii) an auxiliary usage of a verb *get* followed by a past participle form of a verb, as in (1b).

(1) He **got** arrested to test the law.
b. He **was** arrested to test the law [Weiner & Labov, 1983: 31].

I call the former ***get*-passives** and the latter ***be*-passives** throughout the present paper.

Passives in English is one of the well-studied topics in syntax in various subdisciplines, from a descriptive approach to the generative enterprise. However, *get*-passives do not get as much attention as *be*-passives. Moreover, *get*-passives are analyzed just as a comparator to *be*-passives.

The present paper employs a variationist approach [Labov, 1972, 1975; Labov et al., 1968] to examine the passive construction, assuming that *be*- and *get*-passives are interchangeable (at least in certain contexts) [Labov, 1975, Weiner & Labov, 1983]. Based on the data derived from a corpus *Quebec English Project* (QEP; see the next section for details), it is proposed that the choice of *get*-passives is conditioned by the following three independent factors: age, presence/absence of *by*-phrase, types of verbs as to their subcategorization and dynamicity.

This paper is organized as follows. First, the methodology of the study is presented, including the research question, the corpus, and how to analyze the data, in Section 2. Variable contexts and instances included in and excluded from this study are also clarified in this section. Section 3 presents the hypotheses, which are established based on past studies, and then proposes the conditioning factors for the choice of *get*-passives. It is also discussed that those hypotheses based on past studies are not operationalizable for data. Section 4 provides further discussions and theoretical implications that are derived from the argument and testing of the hypotheses. Section 5 closes the paper by offering a further roadmap for future research.

The present study, although the corpus employed is a relatively small scale, contributes to the field by providing an analysis of a somewhat understudied type of passives from diverse descriptive and theoretical frameworks, as well as offering a suggestion on the methodology, and an implication to the form-meaning interface.

Method

Based on past studies from diverse perspectives, from work by traditional grammarians to generative perspectives, cognitive perspectives, and sociolinguistic studies, I hypothesize conditioning factors and test them with corpus data derived as outlined below.

2.1. The corpus

The data on which this study is based were extracted from the Quebec English Corpus (QEP) [Poplack et al., 2006] housed at the Sociolinguistics Laboratory at the University of Ottawa. QEP contains data on spoken English in Quebec, Canada, derived from 19 speakers, including nine females and 10 males, ranging from 19 to 78 years old. There were 575 tokens of *be*-passives and 93 tokens of *get*-passives, as shown in Table 1. See Appendix 1 for the list of the speakers and their social backgrounds.

Table 1

Overall distribution of passives

	Percentage	Number	Number of verbs
Get	14	93	57
Be	86	575	217
Total		668	274

In this paper, the data elicited from the corpus is indicated as, e.g., [QEP 123: 456]. The first code (e.g., 123) refers to the speaker number, and the second code (e.g., 456) refers to the line number in the QEC. Examples are reproduced verbatim from speaker utterances. Bolding and underlining are added by the author throughout this paper.

2.2. Variable and variants

The expression of passives is explored in this project, focusing on two types of passives as variants, that is, *be*-passives and *get*-passives.

2.3. Variable contexts

2.3.1. Background: Do these two types of passives mean the same?

In the present study, it is assumed that *get*-passives and *be*-passives describe an identical situation (at least in certain environments); i.e., these are variants of the same variable. In the literature [Fleisher, 2005; Haegeman, 1985; Lakoff, 1971; Medina, 2009, among many others], at issue are mainly differences between *be*- and *get*-passives, and therefore scholars attempt to create a linguistic environment to differentiate one from the other. For instance, it is observed [Lakoff, 1971] that when there is a

disambiguating factor, *be*- and *get*-passives have a contrast in the meanings of the sentences. Consider (2):

(2) a. He **got** arrested to test the law.

b. He **was** arrested to test the law [Weiner & Labov, 1983: 31].

In (2), the purpose clause *to test the law* disambiguates the role of the surface subject of the sentences. In (2a), the surface subject *he* is interrupted as an agent of testing, while in (2b), the subject is considered as a patient or a theme of arrest, in which someone else has an intention to test the law. Based on these contrasts, it is argued [Lakoff, 1071] that two types of passives differ syntactically and semantically.

It is argued, however, that without a disambiguating element, these two types of passives are semantically identical [Labov, 1975; Weiner & Labov, 1983]. These works claim that the interchangeability of *be*- and *get*-passives can be tested by 'asking whether there is any difference in semantic interpretation…without any conscious reflection about language' [Labov, 1975: 50]. To show, without a purpose clause, e.g., *to test the law* in (2), *get*- and *be*-passives were used interchangeably, W. Labov [Labov, 1975: 49-52] conducted an experiment that he called the *Jay-walking experiment*, where passers-by in Philadelphia are asked to answer to "a traffic survey", as in (3).

(3) a. "It's about cops and jay-walkers.

b. This happened in Milwaukee, where it's a big issue.

c. This man came to a corner.

d. The light was against him.

e. There was a cop on the corner.

f. And there was [sic] no cars coming.

g. And he crossed the street.

h. _____.

i. Do you think that was the right thing to do?

The referent of *that* in (3i) is ambiguous: crossing the street or arresting him. The blank in (3h) is filled with one of the sentences in (4) to test whether *get* and *be* affect the listeners' understanding of what is *that* in (3i).

(4) a. He was arrested to test the law.

b. He was arrested.

c. He got arrested.

d. He got arrested to test the law.

The results of the experiment are shown in Table 2 [Labov, 1975: 52]. With *be*-passives with the purpose clause as in (4a) and (a) in Table 2, the participant showed a strong preference for arresting him as the referent of the *right thing to do*. With *get*-passives with the purpose clause as in (4d) and (d) in Table 2, the participants' preferences on the referent of the *right thing to do* were even between arresting him and crossing the street. Meanwhile, without the purpose clause, *get*- and *be*-passives are construed interchangeably since no discrepancy is observed between them. These results indicate that the purpose clause differentiates the meanings of *be*-passives and *get*-passives.

Table 2

Effect of Purpose Clause on get- and be- Passive in Jay-walking Experiment

Condition		Referent of "Right thing to do"	
		Arrest him	Cross the street
(a)	Be+Purpose (Wp)	18	3
(b)	Be+(W)	20	6
(c)	Get (G)	20	7
(d)	Get +Purpose (Gp)	13	13

Thus, *be*- and *get*-passives are referentially identical in cases where there is no disambiguating element (see Lavandera, 1978 and Schleef & Meyerhoff, 2010 for an opposing view with regard to the definition and treatment of variables). In the corpus study in the present project, only *be*- and *get*-passives were examined.

2.3.2. What is Included in the present study?

The tokens of passive sentences in which *be* or *get* is used as an auxiliary verb were collected. For *get*-passives, the term "auxiliary verb" is not used for the case, where it behaves like a modal verb syntactically in North American English (e.g., *be, have*), as *get* does not precede the subject in negative and interrogative sentences, as in (5).

(5) a. *He got not arrested. cf. He did not get arrested.

b. *Got he arrested? cf. He did not get arrested.

Rather, by the term 'auxiliary', the *get* that takes as its complement an event denoted by another predicate was included in the present study. For instance, in a sentence, *He got arrested*, for instance, *got* takes another verbal predicate *arrested* as the complement.

2.3.3. What is excluded from the present study?

Even if *get* or *be* is used as a passive auxiliary, the following cases were excluded from the present study: idiomatic expressions (e.g., *get started*, *be supposed to*), causatives (e.g., *get my work done*), adjectival usages (e.g., *get tired of*), perfect aspect, cases where a disambiguating factor is present, as in (6).

(6) They **get** hired to sell our business solutions products [QEP, 315: 1420].

Results & Discussions

In this section, the results of the sociolinguistic examinations on the English passives are reported. Then, those are compared with analyses from different theoretical frameworks to establish the conditioning factors of passives in English.

3.1. Age and Sex

W.Labov [Labov, 1996] claims that "a number of studies had shown that the use of the *get*-passive was increasing steadily among younger speakers" (p.81). Although he does not provide references for this discussion, C.Feagan [Feagin, 1979] and J.Weiner & W.Labov [Weiner & Labov, 1983] demonstrate that the young generation (along with contrasts by sex and by social class) shows a clear difference from adults with respect to the use of *get*-passive. Table 3 and Table 4 show the results of the study

in C. Feagin [Feagin, 1979] and J.Weiner & W.Labov [Weiner & Labov,1983], respectively.

Table 3

Distribution of get-passive by sex and age Feagin [1979]

	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Older-women	196	22	43
Older- men	209	22	45
Teenager-grils	52	50	26
Teenager-boys	96	64	61
Total	553	32	175

Table 4

Distribution of get-passive by sex and age [Weiner &Labov 1983;43]

Sex/age group	Tokens	Auxiliary	
Adults			
Female	265	77	20
Male	170	78	20
Adolescents			
Female	30	63	37
Male (total)	87	32	66
Black	56	25	75
White	31	48	52

*Note.**The remaining percentages are for *have passives* with numbers too small to be considered for social distribution.

The results in Table 3 clearly suggest that age in tandem with sex is a strong conditioning factor in choosing the *get*-passive. The trend found in Table 4 also indicates that groups in terms of age and sex show a difference in the distribution of *be*- and *get*-passives: *get*-passives are preferred to *be*-passives by male adolescents, in particular blacks. In both studies, age by itself functions as a conditioning factor for *get*-passive, whereas sex by itself does not show a substantial discrepancy. For instance, in Table 3, the women use *get*-passives in 29% (72/248), while the men in 28% (86/305). These results contradict (not clearly, though) the results in Table 4, which suggest that the use of *get*-passives seems to be considered as "a stigmatized sociolinguistic variant" [Weiner & Labov, 1983: 43], and therefore, it is used more by males than females. Rather, sex functions as a conditioning factor in tandem with age (and also with social class, as discussed later).

Following these past studies, the tokens are coded for age and sex, as in the present study. Ages are further divided into 2 levels of groups. First, Young (YG) or Aged (AG). The speakers in the corpus show a bimodal distribution, that is, 10 young speakers ranging from 19 to 30 years old and

9 elder speakers ranging from 61 to 78 years old. Moreover, each age group is divided into narrower ranges of age groups as in Table 5.

Table 5

Age groups in the present study

		Age	Number of speakers
a	Teens (T)	19	2
b	Lower 20's (S)	20–25	6
c	Upper 20's (V)	29–30	2
d	60's (W)	61–65	5
e	70' (X)	70–78	4

Table 6 demonstrates that the hypothesis that age is a conditioning factor in choosing the *get*-passive is borne out as the young group shows a strong preference for *get*-passives (although still, it forms a much smaller portion than *be*-passives).

Table 6

Distribution of get-passive by age group 1

	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Young (YG)	350	21	72
Aged (AG)	318	7	21
Total	668	14	93

Nevertheless, the hypothesis needs further discussion since the detailed grouping of age does not support this hypothesis clearly, as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7

Distribution of get-passive by age groups 2

	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Teens (T)	74	31	23
20–25 (U)	193	19	37
29–30 (V)	83	14	12
60–66 (W)	216	4	8
70–76 (X)	102	13	13
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

Although teens and speakers in their lower 20s show a preference for *get*-passives, those in their upper 20s (including those who are 30 years old) do not. Moreover, the 60s and 70s show a clear contrast in the distribution of *get*-passives. While the 60's disprefer the *get*-passives (as predicted in the

hypothesis), the 70's (13%) show as strong preference as the overall distribution (14%). Tentative results that could be extracted from these data at this point are that age by itself is not a strong conditioning factor, although an incline is observed among the younger generation, particularly teenagers.

Next, the distributions by sex and, in particular, combinations of sex and age (age groups) are presented. Table 8 illustrates the distribution of *get*-passives by sex.

Table 8

Distribution of get-passive by sex

	Total	**Percentage of Get**	**Number of Get**
Female (F)	286	16	45
Male (M)	382	13	48
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

As shown in Table 8, following C. Feagin [Feagin,1979], but contra J.Weiner & W.Labov [Weiner & Labov, 1983], sex does not condition the choice of the *get*-passive. At most, we could tell that females show, though weakly, more preference than men.

Next, combinations of age groups (Table 6 and Table 7) and sex are illustrated in Table 9 and Table 10, respectively.

Table 9

Distribution of get-passive by sex and age group 1

	Total	**Percentage of Get**	**Number of Get**
Young female (YG-F)	193	22	43
Yung-male (YG-M)	157	18	29
Aged-female (AG-F)	93	2	2
Aged-male (AG-M)	225	8	19
Total	668	14	93

Table 10

Distribution of get-passive by sex and age groups 2

	Total	**Percentage of Get**	**Number of Get**
Teen female (T-F)	34	38	13
Teen-male (T-M)	40	25	10
Lower 20's female (U-F)	120	23	28

Lower 20's male (U-M)	73	12	9
Upper 20's female (V-F)	39	5	2
Upper 20's male (V-M)	44	23	10
60's female (W-F)	86	1	1
60's male (W-M)	130	5	7
70's female (X-F)	7	14	1
70's male (X-M)	95	13	12
Total	668	14	93

The combination of detailed age groups and sex in Table 10 is not even compatible with C. Feagin [Feagin, 1979], whose data suggest that young boys use the *get*-passive than young girls. Again, there are some discrepancies among the young: teens and lower 20s on the one hand and upper 30s on the other. In the former group, females show more preference than men. The speakers in the 30's show the trend the other way around.

The distributions of *get*-passives by speakers are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Distribution of Get-passive by speakers

Speaker	Age	Sex	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
303	19	F	34	38	13
309	19	M	40	25	10
302	20	M	31	26	8
308	21	F	20	20	4
301	22	F	54	22	12
304	23	F	23	30	7
307	23	F	23	22	5
314	25	M	42	2	1
313	29	F	40	8	3
315	30	M	44	23	10
317	61	M	18	6	1
311	65	F	80	0	0
310	66	M	76	5	4
319	66	M	36	6	2
320	66	F	5	0	0
318	70	M	44	11	5
306	73	M	37	5	2
316	76	M	14	36	5
305	78	F	7	14	1
Total			668	14	93

Table 11 demonstrates (though not conclusively) that whether strongly or weakly, age is a conditioning factor toward the choice of the *get*-passive; the younger generations prefer *get*-passives over others. In the younger generations, speakers consistently show a strong preference toward the *get*-passive; the lowest among these speakers is Speaker 301 (20%). In particular, the trend is stronger in girls than boys (Table 10). An answer can

be provided at this point to explain the differences between 23 and 25 years old, which show a clear contrast in the distributions of *get*-passives. Here, it is tentatively assumed that over 25 years old, the choice of *get*-passives is not conditioned by age, but it is ideolectal if no other factors are concerned. It is noteworthy that it has been confirmed that irregular distributions, as in Speakers 315 and 316, cannot be attributed to the frequent use of certain verb(s): the former uses seven verbs for 10 tokens; the latter uses different verbs in each token.

Thus, age (young) is a strong factor in the choice of *get*-passive, but this effect vanishes at most at or around 25 years old. In the younger generation, sex (female) is an even stronger factor that leads to choosing the *get*-passive, as shown in Table 11.

3.2. Social Economic Class and Market Index

One of the common myths with regard to *get*-passive is that it is used in informal or vulgar speech forms. R. Macaulay [Macaulay, 1991], cited in J. Cheshire [Cheshire, 2005], illustrates that *get*-passives are more common among working-class speakers than middle-class speakers. C. Feagin [Feagin, 1979: 97] conducts a quantitative study in Alabama English, as in Table 12.

Table 12

Distribution of get-passive and be-passives by age, social class and sex [Feagin 1979:97]

	Instances		Percentage
	Get	**Be**	**of Get**
Older			
Upper class			
Women (N=6)	10	62	13.8
Men (N=6)	9	59	13.2
Working class			
Rural women (N=8)	16	48	25
Rural men (N=7)	15	54	21.7
Urban women (N=6)	17	43	28.3
Urban men (N=6)	21	51	29.1
Teenagers			
Upper class			
Girl (N=6)	12	22	35.2
Boys (N=6)	41	30	57.7
Working class			
Girls (N=7)	14	4	77.7
Boys (N=7)	20	5	80

Table 12 shows that more teenagers use *get*-passives than the older, and more men/boys tend to use *get*-passives than women/girls, and the working class uses *get*-passives more than the upper class. Thus, social class seems to affect the choice of *get*-passives.

To test whether *get*-passives are used in informal or vulgar speech, two potential conditional factors for the use of passives are examined: the Market Index [Sankoff & Roberge, 1978] and the Social Economic Class.

The Market Index is a scale that indicates how important the use of language is to speakers. The index is coded 1 to 4, with 1 being the most important and with 4 being the least important. Social Economic Class is coded in terms of the level of the required skill. Highly skilled (A) is a class for which post-secondary education is required. Skilled (B) is a class for which a college education is needed. Moderately Skilled (C) is a class that secondary education or occupational school suffices. Unskilled (D) does not require a substantial level of skills. Table 13 illustrates the distribution of *get*-passives by Market Index.

Table 13

Distribution of get-passive by Market index

	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
1 (important)	139	16	22
2	269	15	40
3	220	13	28
4 (Not important)	40	8	3
Total	668	14	93

Overall, no strong preference is observed, but it suggests a weak incline toward the group that considers the value of certain language usage high. This is surprising, considering past studies and the common myth that *get*-passives are, to some extent, informal compared with *be*-passives.

The distributions of *get*-passives by Market Index in combination with age group and sex are examined in Table 14 and Table 15, respectively.

Table 14

Distribution of Get-Passive by Age and Market Index

Market Index	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Index 1 Young (1-YG)	40	25	10
Index 1 Aged (1-AG)	99	12	12
Index 2 Young (2-YG)	131	24	32
Index 2 Aged (2-AG)	138	6	8
Index 3 Young (3-YG)	140	20	28
Index 3 Aged (3-AG)	80	0	0
Index 4 Young (4-YG)	39	5	2
Index 4 Aged (4-AG)	1	100	1
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

Table 15

Distribution of Get-Passive by Sex and Market Index

Market Index	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Index 1 Female (1-F)	5	0	0
Index 1 Male (1-M)	134	16	22
Index 2 Female (2-F)	107	23	25
Index 2 Male (2-M)	162	9	15
Index 3 Female (3-F)	134	13	17
Index 3 Male (3-M)	86	13	11
Index 4 Female (4-F)	40	8	3
Index 4 Male (4-M)	0	0	0
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

As described in Table 14, the age group (young) shows a stronger preference when it is in tandem with the Market Index (ignoring the Index 4 aged group due to the scarcity of the token). Sex is not likely to contribute to the choice of *get*-passives, even when it is correlated with the Market Index, as illustrated in Table 15.

Next, the distribution of *get*-passives by Social Economic Class is shown in Table 16. Again, contrary to past studies and the common myth, Social Economic Class is not a conditioning factor for the choice of *get*-passives. This is true even when sex is considered, as in Table 17.

Table 16

Distribution of Get-Passive by Social Economic Class

Social Economic Class	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Highly Skilled (A)	295	15	45
Skilled (B)	267	13	35
Moderately Skilled (C)	36	12	10
Unskilled (D)	70	16	11
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

Table 17

Distribution of Get-Passive by Sex and Social Economic Class

Social Economic Class	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Highly Skilled Female (A-F)	120	23	28
Highly Skilled Male (A-M)	175	10	17
Skilled Female (B-F)	154	16	16
Skilled Male (B-M)	113	17	19
Moderately Skilled Female (C-F)	0	0	0

Social Economic Class	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Moderately Skilled Male (C-M)	36	6	10
Unskilled Female (D-F)	12	8	1
Unskilled Male (D-M)	58	17	9
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

The distribution of *get*-passive by Social Economic Class and age group, illustrated in Table 18, shows a strong preference among (highly) skilled young speakers.

Table 18

Distribution of Get-Passive by Age Group and Social Economic Class

Social Economic Class	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Highly Skilled Young (A-YG)	164	23	38
Highly Skilled Aged (A-AG)	131	5	7
Skilled Young (B-YG)	186	18	34
Skilled Aged (B-AG)	81	1	1
Moderately Skilled Young (C-YG)	0	0	0
Moderately Skilled Aged (C-AG)	36	6	2
Unskilled Young (D-YG)	0	0	0
Unskilled Aged (D-AG)	70	16	11
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

Thus, based on the data so far, it is suggested that we should refute the myth of the *get*-passive and past studies. It might be safe, however, to claim that social factors do not crucially affect the choice of *get*-passives compared with age.

3.3. Animacy of subject

From the generative approach, it is observed [Hoshi, 1999, Morita, 2012] that the subject of *get*-passives needs to be an animate entity that is capable of having a feeling. As illustrated in (11), the subject of the *get*-passives should be a potential experiencer. It is argued [Hoshi, 1999] that since an inanimate entity cannot be an experiencer, the example in (7a) is not grammatical.

(7) a. *The parallel postulate **got** chosen by the mathematicians.

b. The parallel postulate **was** chosen by the mathematicians [Hoshi, 1999: 199].

From the cognitive approach, it is argued [Langacker, 2000] that *get*-passives show gradation in terms of the experiencer of the events and participation of the surface subject. Consider the following examples:

(8) a. Sue **got** (herself) appointed to the governing board.

b. Ralph **got** fired again.

c. All my books **got** stolen.

d. Another bank **got** robbed last night.

The *get*-passives in (8), although some types are circumscribed from the variable contexts in the present paper, differ with regard to the involvement of the experiencer denoted by the embedded verb. In (8a), the surface subject *Sue* is also the experiencer of the event, *appointed to the governing board*. It is argued [Langacker, 2000] that get-passives are used when the active involvement of Sue to be appointed is perceived. *Ralph* in (8b) does not get involved actively, but he has enough reason to be fired again, e.g., his undesirable quality, his actions, his behavior, etc. The experiencer in the event in (8c) is no longer the subject; the possessive pronoun *my* barely indicates the speaker is the experiencer. The experiencer, in this sentence, however, seems to have no control over the event in which someone stole her/his books. Experiencer is not always necessary as in (8d), which can be used by 'lawful members of society who feel menaced by the rising level of crime' [Langacker, 2000: 314]. This attenuation of the control of the experiencer patterns with historical development and grammaticalization of the *get* auxiliary [Hatcher, 1949].

Through a sociolinguistic survey, it is demonstrated [Macaulay, 1991, Rickford, 1985] that *get*-passives are commonly used with human subjects. Assuming that their analyses (and judgment) are on the right track, the tokens in the present project are coded in terms of the animacy of the surface subject, as shown below. I group the tokens into three groups (9) since only one instance of non-human animates (i.e., animal) is found: *The animal that is spelled w-o-l-f* [QEP, 314: 1559]. Pronouns *it* and *they* are not always clear as to their animacy of the referent, and thus I create the Unknown code (10).

(9) a. *Animate (ANI)*: we could've even **got** shot [QEP 318: 266].

b. *Inanimate* (INA): The TV would **get** taken away [QEP 301: 892].

(10) *Unknown* (?):

Were they mixed in classes? Oh yeah. They **were** mixed in classes but not on the playground [QEP 319: 67].

As shown in Table 19, *get*-passives tend to be used with human subjects, which seems to support the hypothesis.

Table 19

Distribution of Get-Passive by Animacy of the Subject

Animacy Category	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Animate (ANI)	350	22	76
Inanimate (INA)	301	6	17
Unknown (?)	17	0	0
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

3.4. Subcategorization

It is still not clear, however, whether the preference for certain animacy groups, if any, stems from the properties of *get*-passives or from

the preference of verbs that are frequently used in *get*-passives [Cheshire, 2005]. Thus, the tokens are also coded for types of verbs; a verb is coded in terms of whether it has a preference for the animacy of its complement (the complement becomes the surface subject in passives): animate (11a), inanimate (11b), and no preference (NO). The classification follows entries and descriptions in the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (7th Edition, 2005).

(11) a. *Subcategorizing animate nouns* (ANI):

Well, don't you **get** baptized as something? [QEP 303: 948]

- Verbs in this group (51 verbs): e.g., *arrest, baptize, blindside, chauffer*

b. Subcategorizing *inanimate nouns* (INA):

They [= goals] rarely **get** done, unfortunately [QEP 315: 640].

- Verbs in this group (49 verbs): e.g., *build, cancel, do, ship, spell*

c. No preference (NO)

A tube that **gets** pulled behind the boat [QEP 304: 435].

- Verbs in this group (141 verbs): e.g., *accept, blame, kick*, etc.

The distribution of *get*-passives by types of nouns selected by a verb is described in Table 20. There is a substantial tendency towards verbs that select animate objects (i.e., the surface subjects in passives).

Table 20

Distribution of Get-Passive by Subject Categorization of the Verb

Subject Categorization	**Total**	**Percentage of Get**	**Number of Get**
Animate (ANI)	129	40	52
Inanimate (INA)	108	6	7
No Preference (No)	431	8	34
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

I further examine the distribution of *get*-passives by the animacy of the subject and the subcategorization of the verb, as in Table 21.

Table 21

Distribution of Get-Passive by the Animacy of the Subject and the Subject Categorization of the Verb

Subject Categorization – Animacy	**Total**	**Percentage of Get**	**Number of Get**
Animate-Animate (ANI-ANI)	125	42	52
Animate-Inanimate (ANI-INA)	2	0	0
Animate-Unknown (ANI-?)	1	0	0
Inanimate-Animate (INA-ANI)	2	0	0
Inanimate-Inanimate (INA-INA)	105	7	7
Inanimate-Unknown (INA-?)	1	0	0

Subject Categorization – Animacy	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
No Preference-Animate (NO-ANI)	223	11	10
No Preference-Inanimate (NO-INA)	194	5	10
No Preference-Unknown (NO-?)	15	0	0
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

As expected, the subject of most sentences with verbs that select animate objects is animate, and the subject of most sentences with verbs that select inanimate objects is inanimate. The sentences in (12) are exceptional cases in which an inanimate subject is used with an animate-selecting verb (12a) or an animate subject is used with an animate-selecting verb (12b).

(12) a. cause not all summer placements are guaranteed to **be** paid [QEP 301: 1986].

b. He **was** first published when he was eighteen by a local [QEP 314: 1559].

The mismatch in (16a) seems to be caused by dropping *for* after the verb; cf., *not all summer placements are guaranteed to be paid for*. (12b) involves a metonymy; a book is expressed with the content (or writer) of the book, i.e., *he*, assuming that the sentence means, e.g., *His book was first published when he was eighteen.*

Table 21 illustrates that verbs with no preference for the animacy of the subcategorized objects do not show preference for the *get*-passive. This, in turn, suggests that animate-selecting verbs condition the choice of the *get*-passive. Because preferred verbs select animate subject, the animacy of the subject appears to be a conditioning factor. If the animacy of the subject is the leading conditioning factor, verbs with no preference should equally be employed as often as ones with animate objects. Namely, the preference for animate subjects is, in fact, the epiphenomenon of the preference for animate-selecting verbs.

3.5. Agent phrases

It has been widely observed [Greenbaum et al., 1972; Hatcher, 1949,, Medina, 2009; Quirk et al., 1972, 1985; Svartvik, 1966] that *get*-passives are restricted to ‘constructions without an expressed animate agent’ [Quirk et al., 1985: 802], as in (13). Similarly, it is claimed [Carter & McCarthy, 2006] that *by*-phrase used with *get*-passives is far rarer than with *be*-passives. Two restrictions can be posited on its use. First, an agent expressed in a *by*-phrase should not be agentful [Svartvik, 2009]. Second, agent phrases should bring new information to conversation [Biber et al., 1999; Carter & McCarthy, 1999]. The tokens are coded in terms of whether the sentence contains a *by*-phrase.

(13) *The boy **got** given a violin by his father [Greenbaum et al., 1972: 802].

As seen in Table 21, the overt agent phrase is quite rare in *get*-passives (1/93 tokens), and this one single instance follows the restriction, as in (14). An agent, *Scotia* is the focus of the sentence, that brings new information.

Table 22

Distribution of Get-Passive by Presence/Absence of By-Phrase

By-Phrase Presence	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
With a By-Phrase (Y)	31	3	1
Without By-Phrase (N)	637	14	92
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

The trust company … **got** bought out by Scotia [QEP, 313: 530].

However, the use of the *by*-phrase itself is not far from common: 1/93 (1.0%) in *get*-passives, 30/575 (5.2%) in *be*-passives, and 31/668 (4.6%). These numbers are compatible with those of Quirk et al. [Quirk et al., 1985], who argue that *by*-phrases are used in five percent of passives. Moreover, it is observed [Siewierska & Bakker, 2012] that missing an agent phrase in passives is a cross-linguistic phenomenon. They also claim, however, that 11% of passives in English contain an agent phrase. Although there is a clear discrepancy between *get*- and *be*-passives in terms of the use of an agent phrase, it is not clear to what extent *get*-passives (rather than as a property of a passive construction) avoid the overtly expressed agent phrases.

3.6. Dynamicity of verbs

It is claimed [Carter et al., 2006] claim that *get*-passives are used only with a dynamic verb, which denotes 'actions or events rather than states' (p.800), as shown in contrasts in the following:

(14) a. A headmaster **got** stabbed a few weeks ago.

b. *The standard unit of mass used by all scientists **gets** kept at the International Bureau of Weight and Measure [Carter et al., 2006: 800].

From a diachronic viewpoint, J.Byun [Byun, 2013] reaches a similar conclusion based on the function of the *get*-passives, claiming that *get*-passives are used to differentiate the meaning of the sentences from *be*-passives in dynamicity. Byun argues that *get*- and *be*-passives are distinguished depending on whether the event is dynamic or stative, respectively, and thus, *get*-passives are exclusively used with a dynamic verb (since a passivized stative verb is unlikely to be dynamic).

R. Quirk et al. [Quirk et al., 1972,1985] assume that *get*-passives can be used to disambiguate two interpretations of the passive: dynamic passives and statal passives. They argue that statal passives are not available in *get*-passives. The tokens are coded with regard to the dynamicity of verbs:

(15) a. *Dynamic* (D): I'd **get** sent to bed [QEP, 301: 887].

b. *Stative* (S): Most of Europe actually **is**n't included [QEP, 314:26].

In this study, verbs were simply classified into two groups, viz. Stative or Dynamic [Dowty, 1979; Quirk et al., 1972, 1985]. A verb was classified as Stative when either of these works coded it as Stative. The same thing

goes with Dynamic. The similarity in meanings was judged based on R. Dixon [Dixon, 2005] and E. Levin [Levin, 1993]. Unfortunately, however, not all verbs in the corpus were classified with these past studies on verb classes. The verbs that are not in either of the articles above were classified based on descriptions from the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Verbs classified in this way are exemplified in (17).

(16) a. Dynamic

absorb, adopt, advance, air-condition, align, amend, blindside, brainwash, bury, cancel, civilize, conceive, congest, crap, discipline, dupe, educate, entrench, exaggerate, expose, focus, force, gear, highlight, hold, interview,

b. Stative:

base, control, mistake, occupy, outnumber, ration, reflect, restrict, sandwich, spell, terrace

Most verbs are straightforward in terms of dynamicity, whereas some are not clear. For instance, the verb *occupy* is classified as Stative. The dictionary also says, however, that the verb might have a meaning similar to *invade*. Though it is unlikely to be a common usage of *occupy*, this usage should be classified as Dynamic. Interestingly, the verb in the corpus is used in the context of war, as in (18). Considering the stativity of the context in the sentences, I classified the verb into Stative.

(17) She was born in France. She was born in- it **was** German occupied [QEP, 315: 338].

The distribution of *get*-passives by the dynamicity of the verb in Table 23 suggests that the dynamicity is a factor in the choice of *get*-passive.

Table 23

Distribution of Get-Passive by Dynamicity of the Verb

Verb Type	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
Dynamic (D)	530	17	90
Stative (S)	138	2	3
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

Note that the dynamicity discussed here is a lexical property of main verbs, and it does not always imply the dynamicity of the passive sentence in which the verb is used. Nevertheless, this trend might support an unoperationalizable hypothesis that *get*-passives are used to express a dynamic event [Quirk et al., 1985].

3.7. Types of subject

In this study, the grammatical types of the surface subject were also tested to determine whethert the choice of passives was affected. To test this, the surface subjects were further coded for grammatical person and number as in (19). Generalized pronouns include *nothing*, *nobody*, *someone*, and *everyone.* When the sentence does not include an overt subject and the

context does not tell the referent of the covert subject, it is coded as Unknown.

(18) a. 1st person singular (1S): I'd **get** sent to bed early [QEP, 301: 887].

b. 1st person plural (1P): then we **got** caught [QEP, 303: 797].

c. 2nd person (singular, plural) (2): if you keep it up, you're gonna **get** fired [QEP, 315: 1439].

d. 3rd person singular (3S): and then he **got** kicked out of daycare for beating [QEP, 315: 1068].

e. 3rd person plural (3P): They **got** charged with all kinds of violations [QEP, 309: 1154].

f. Generalized pronoun (4): but nothing **gets** done [QEP, 315: 1412].

Well, someone **got** stabbed [QEP, 309: 1158].

g. Full nominal phrase (NA): our portables **got** burnt down [QEP, 301: 367].

h. Unknown (?): … have to come over and tag you and get you out, without **being** caught themselves [QEP, 307: 213].

Table 24 shows the distribution of *get*-passives in terms of types of the subject.

Table 24

Distribution of Get-Passive by Types of the Subject

Subject Type	Total	Percentage of Get	Number of Get
1st Person Singular (1S)	93	20	19
1st Person Plural (1P)	40	18	7
2nd Person (2)	57	21	12
3rd Person Singular (3S)	168	11	19
3rd Person Plural (3P)	74	8	6
Generalized (4)	30	30	9
Unknown (?)	3	0	0
Not a Pronominal (NA)	203	10	21
Total	**668**	**14**	**93**

Among various possibilities to explain this trend is that the use of first and second person and generalized pronouns, including *everyone, nothing,* etc., reflects the speakers' attitude towards the referent of the surface subject.

Further Discussions

4.1. A diachronic shift

As seen in G.Curme [Curme, 1935], who calls *get*-passives *New passive actional forms* (p.218), *get*-passives are thought to be a relatively

new construction (In fact, it has been used since 17th century, though [Hatcher, 1949]), and used increasingly [Cheshire, 2005, Feagin, 1979, Jespersen, 1909-1949, Weiner & Labov, 1983]). The percentage of *get*-passives out of all passive tokens has not been increased; however, for instance, it is shown [Weiner & Labov, 1983] that 20 % of passives are *get*-passives among adult speakers. It is also shown [Feagin, 1975] that at least 20% of passives are *get*-passives in all groups. The data in the present study (established in 2013) contains only 14 % of *get*-passives. Although it is far from conclusive since no analysis is made to explore the increase or decrease of passives overall, *get*-passives do not seem to drastically increase in number. The data in this study also illustrate that *get*-passives are preferred among the younger generation. This trend is based on past studies from 30 years ago. Compared with C.Feagin [Feagin, 1979], J.Weiner & W.Labov [Weiner & Labov, 1983], which show a similar distribution conditioned by age, it is concluded here that there is not a solid shift towards *get*-passives currently in the history of English.

4.2. Rule-based model & usage-based model

The preference for *get*-passives is observed in terms of the animacy of the subject and the type of a verb with respect to subcategorization. As discussed in the previous section, these two factors are not independent of each other. It is assumed that what is called a 'restriction' by the formalists, in which the subject of *get*-passives should be animate, is, in fact, an epiphenomenon caused by certain types of verbs for which *get*-passives prefer. Also, the fact that inanimate subjects are possible in *get*-passives (though with relatively low rates; 6-8%) leads us to argue against the formalist view, which posits a clear-cut rule-based dichotomy. Rather, as R.Langacker [Langacker, 2000] claims, attenuation of control of the surface subject in various types of *get*-passives reflects prototypicality and/or historical development.

In what follows, the interpretation and derivation of sentences are further discussed. The formalists commonly expect that a sentence is generated through morphosyntactic and phonological rules. A sentence is interpreted by applying the sentence in question to the grammar equipped in the mind/brain of the speaker/listener. The data in the present project shows that no independent factors have all-or-nothing distributions: e.g., *by*-phrase is possible in get-passives; inanimate subject is possible; stative verbs are possible. It is postulated that the listener/reader interprets a sentence so that it becomes most suitable in the context rather than applying grammatical rules to the sentence. For instance, suppose that a listener/reader finds a *by*-phrase in a *get*-passive. The person does not judge it ungrammatical by applying a rule like one assumed among (some of) the formalists. The person does not, either, first identify the information structure of the utterances in order to check if the *by*-phrase is new information (and then apply it to the new-information restriction). Rather, following the usage-based model [Langacker, 2000, Tomasello (ed.), 1998-2003], s/he interprets the sentence in such a way that a *by*-phrase is likely to be new information since the most natural usage of a *by*-phrase is bringing new information or expressing an agent with least agentivity. On the other hand, when the speaker generates a sentence, s/he is not likely to select an exact set of

necessary words and phrases from the mental lexicon, as posited by generativists. S/he creates a sentence by making use of words and phrases at hand, even though the outcome sentence does not form a full set of words to express what s/he wants to express. Thus, a quantitative study feeds a counterargument toward a formalist view, in particular, a generativist view. (This is true even when considering the historical background (or politics) of developing subfields of linguistics.)

The idea of sentence interpretation and generation just posited, however, also casts a small doubt on a crucial and basic in this study; namely, the interchangeability of *be*- and *get*-passives. Contrary to W.Labov [Labov, 1975], who argues the referential interchangeability based on the *Jay-walking experiment*, it should also be postulated that employing a certain form or interpreting in a certain way does not necessarily indicate that the speaker/listener process in the same way.

Conclusion & Further Directions

It was demonstrated that the use of *get*-passives is conditioned by the following three factors: age, presence/absence of an agent phrase, and the types of verbs. The younger generation shows a strong preference toward get-passives than the older generation. This trend is even stronger among teenagers. *Get*-passives are less likely to be employed when a speaker wants to express an agent overtly with a *by*-phrase. Types of verbs also matter in the choice of *get*-passives. This trend involves two subfactors of the verbs: subcategorization and dynamicity. The verbs that select (subcategorize) animate complements (that would become the surface subject in passives) prefer *get*-passives. Similarly, the verbs that lexically involve a dynamic meaning also prefer *get*-passives. The animacy of the subject is, in fact, an epiphenomenon derived from the subcategorization of verbs. Thus, the corpus in this study demonstrates that some myths about *get*-passives, mostly based on social factors or styles, are not tenable.

It should be noted, however, that the conclusion here is still somewhat suggestive since some factors that are necessary to capture the condition of the choice of *get*-passives, are not available or not operationalizable. In particular, semantic and pragmatic factors are hard to get or code. Moreover, it is suggested that the idea that two expressions (*be*- and *get*-passives in the present paper) are referentially identical should be scrutinized carefully.

To close this paper, other controlling factors for the choice of *get*-passives are suggested as a future direction of the research: styles and adversity/benefactor contrasts.

Whether they show evidence or not, a number of studies on *get*-passives almost uniformly claim that *get*-passives are used in an informal, vulgar, or colloquial style [Byun, 2013, Carter et al., 2006, Cheshire, 2005, Feagin, 1979, Frary, 1929, Fries, 1940, Francis, 1958, Hatcher, 1949, and Jespersen, 1909-49 (cited in J.Svartvik [Svartvik, 1966])]. Similarly, it is widely argued that *get*-passives are avoided in formal speech [Greenbaum et al., 1972; Quirk et al., 1972, 1985]. For instance, W. Francis [Francis, 1958: 335] comments that *get*-passives are ‘in frequency, though grammarians are at present not agreed as to its status’. On the other hand, J.Svartvik

[Svartvik, 1966: 149] argues that 'there is no indication … that the *get*-passive is common in colloquial English'.

Since, unfortunately, the corpus investigated in this project does not contain a variety of styles, this hypothesis is not testable here. We can postulate, nevertheless, that the data thus far suggests that this traditional view is challenged. If the *get*-passive is dominantly used in informal, vulgar, or colloquial speech, it is predicted that more males than females, and more upper-class speakers than working-class speakers are inclined to *get*-passives. As we have seen, these myths are more or less proven to be wrong. This point can be clarified if we can control the styles and formality of the utterances.

One of the most focused phenomena in *get*-passives discussed from the theoretical perspective is an adversity (or, less commonly, benefactive) situation of the surface subject: *get*-passives are used to express a negative (or positive) impact towards the surface subject. For instance, it is argued [Laykoff, 1971, Shibatani, 1983] that the surface subject of *get*-passives denotes or implies the speaker's attitude towards the event. It is claimed [Carter et al., 1999, Quirk et al., 1972, 1985] that *get*-passives put more emphasis on the subject than *be*-passives in terms of benefits or problems. It is likely to be way more common, however, that the data does not tell anything with regard to speakers' feelings or judgments than that those can be captured from the context [Riddle & Sheintuch, 1983]. If we can detect speakers' attitudes in a corpus, the effect of the adversity/benefactor contrast to *get*-passives would be revealed.

Note

While I was writing this article, the field of sociolinguistics suffered a monumental loss with the passing of Dr. William Labov (December 4, 1927 – December 17, 2024), the founder of variationist sociolinguistics. His groundbreaking work transformed our understanding of language in society, leaving a legacy that will continue to inspire scholars for generations. Rest in peace.

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