Passives or Anti-Causatives?

The literature on passives in South Asian languages/SAL recognizes an impersonal passive type with 'hona'/'become' light verbs (1)-(2) that obligatory suppresses its agent (Sridhar 1990, Pardeshi 2007). Taking lead from cross-linguistic studies (eg. Greek), this paper presents an alternative whereby such constructions (including certain 'gayaa'/'go' passives) are reanalyzed as anti-causatives surfacing with passive morphology, while retaining their structural uniqueness. Evidence is presented at two levels – (i) their differences from prototypical SAL passives, and (ii) the active/passive morphological make-up of SAL anti-causatives. I also suggest that though agent-less, these constructions have causers introduced as modifiers at the voiceP level.

It is widely accepted (Mahajan 1994, Bhatt 2003, Richa 2007, Sahoo in progress) that SAL passives differ from their English counterparts in retaining their agentive by-phrases as the grammatical subjects and logical objects as their grammatical objects. In contrast, as I illustrate here, 'become' passives never host their agents as by-phrases (1). The logical object is always case-marked null-nominative, A-binds reflexives (3), fails to bind possessive pronominals/shows anti-subject orientation (4) and controls into conjunctive participle clauses (5), thereby depicting all prototypical subject properties. I use these and related facts to lay the initial ground to reject any analysis of these constructions as passives.

I then go on to present evidence that SAL anti-causatives surface with both active and passive morphology. While avoiding anti-causatives with verbs like 'murder', 'assassinate' whose core verbal meanings are agentive, SALs host anti-causatives with deadjectival ('dry'), 'internally caused' ('grow'), 'cause unspecified' ('break') as well 'externally caused' ('destroy') verbs. Interestingly, alternation between active and passive morphology is quite free for most of these verb-types (6)-(8). The passive is however only a pseudo passive as it obligatorily rules out agentive by-phrases.

SALs therefore conform to Alexiadou's (2006) typological distribution of languages with anti-causatives. They pattern closely with Greek-type languages (contra English-type languages) where all but agentive types can alternate between transitive and intransitive/anti-causative variants, but most crucially, externally caused roots surface with non-active morphology for the intransitives. SALs, as attested by the above examples oscillate between active and passive morphology for all verb (minus agentive) types, though externally caused verbs occur only with passives (9).

I suggest, following Doron (2003), that agent suppression in these constructions follows from selecting the middle voice that reclassifies the root with respect to its requirements of an external argument. In structural terms, this amounts to projecting a voice projection without a specifier for an external argument. This together, with Embick's (1998) correlation between the non-projection of an external argument and the overt passive-like realization of the voice head can explain the morphological overlap between passives and anti-causatives.

Importantly, ruling out an agentive phrase does not necessarily suppress a causer for these constructions. Their instrumental se-marked DPs (10) which could also be event nominals (11), should, I contend, be analyzed as causing events introduced as modifiers to the voiceP (on lines proposed by Solstad 2007 for event passives). This analysis helps keep the notions of agent and causer different at the syntax-semantics interface, with the latter signifying a relation between two events rather than that between entities and events.

(1) (*Pulis dwaaraa) chhe log   giraftaar   hue
    (*police by)   six persons arrested   become
    'Six people were arrested'   (Hindi)
(2) anil arrest ayyaDu
    Anil arrest became.sg.
    'Anil was arrested'   (Telugu)
(3) anil-i apne-i ghar-ke saamne giraftaar hua
    Anil self's house front   arrest   become
    'Anil was arrested in front of his house'   (Hindi)
(4) Anil-i uske-*i/j ghar-ke saamne giraftaar hua
    Anil   his   house   front   arrest   become
(5) Anil-i [PRO-i rokar] giraftaar hua
    Anil   crying   arrest   become
    'Anil was arrested while he was crying'
(6) KapRe sukhe/kapRe sukh gaye   (deadjectival)
    Clothes dried/clothes dry go-pass.
(7) Bacce baRhe/baRe hue   (internally caused)
    Children grew/grow become
(8) (*john dwara) khiRkii TuTii/TuT gayii   (unspecified caused verb)
    John by   windows break/break go-pass.
(9) *Khaanaa barbaada/Khaanaa barbaad huaa   (ext. force required)
     Food   destroyed /food   destroy become
(10) (john-se)   khaanaa barbaad huaa
      John-instr. food   destroy become
(11) bomb bishphot-se   logo-ki   maut huii
      bomb explosion-instr. people-gen. death become
      'People died in the bomb explosion'

Reference:
Alexiadou. A. 2006. 'On the morpho-syntax of (anti)-causative verbs. URL: ifla.uni-
    stuttgart.de/institute/…/Alexiadoou%20to%20appear.pdf
Bhatt, R. 2003. 'Topics in the Syntax of the Modern Indo-Aryan Languages.
    Passivization'. Handout. URL: http://web.mit.edu/rbhatt/www/24.956
Doron, E. 2003. Agency and Voice: The semantics of the semitic templates.NLS
    11(1).
Embick, D. 1998. 'Voice Systems and the Syntax/Morphology Interface'. *MIT
    Working Papers in Linguistics* 32.
Mahajan, A. 1994. 'Active Passives' In Proceedings of the 13th WCCFL. CSLI
    Publications. Standford University.
Pardeshi, P. 'No smoke without fire: Invisible Agent Constructions in South Asian
    Languages'. *Kobe Papers in Linguistics* 5.
Richa. 2007. 'Unaccusativity, Unergativity and the Causative Alternation in Hindi: A
    Minimalist Analysis'. PhD Dissertation. JNU, India.
Sahoo, A. in progress. 'Passives in some Indian Languages: A Comparative Study.'
    PhD Disseration, IIT Delhi.
Solstad, T. 2007. 'On the Implicitness of Arguments in Event Passives, *Proceedings
    of Nels 38*. University of Ottawa.
Sridhar, N. 1990. *Kannada*. London. Routledge.