The Acquisition of Passives in English and Brazilian Portuguese: Regularities despite the Input

Sergio Menuzzi
Pontifical Catholic University at Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil)
menuzzi@pucrs.br

1. Introduction

In a recent experimental study Gabriel (2001) has obtained important comparative data on the acquisition of passives by British and Brazilian Portuguese children. Gabriel claims that her findings support a view proposed by Demuth (1989) and Allen & Crago (1996): the developmental pattern of passives would basically be determined by the specific use and frequency of passives in a particular language – that is, by properties of the *input* to the children. This view is opposed to Borer & Wexler's (1987), according to which "syntactic" passives would be acquired late, and more or less uniformly, across languages because of innate aspects of language. Specifically, Borer & Wexler assume that "syntactic" passives are those involving *A-movement*, a Universal Grammar operation which undergoes *biological maturation* and becomes available to children later than other grammatical resources.

In this paper, I will discuss Gabriel's findings, arguing that: (a) they are better understood if, for the purpose of comparing the acquisition of passives in English and Brazilian Portuguese, we take into consideration the well-known distinction between *be*- and *get*-passives in English, rather than conflate these two structures in one category "passive"; once this is done, (b) Gabriel's results do suggest that the acquisition of passives is sensitive to the input; but this sensitivity would not seem to be a direct consequence of frequency, as proposed by Demuth and Allen & Crago; (c) moreover, some of Gabriel's findings reveal certain regularities in the development of BE-passives that appear to be inconsistent with her assumptions, but compatible with Borer & Wexler's.

2. Gabriel's experiment

In a recently defended PhD dissertation, Gabriel reports on a number of interesting experimental findings concerning the development of passives in English and in Brazilian Portuguese. Here I will be concerned only with the results of one of her studies, a production experiment.

This experiment was conducted with methodology and materials developed by Marchman et al. (1991), with a few improvements. British and Brazilian Portuguese children were shown videotaped cartoon scenes with three characters present. Some scenes were "simple": there was only "one event", in which one of the characters, the *agent*, performed an action affecting another, the *patient*. Scenes might be "complex" as well, with two such actions performed.[1] The experimental procedure began with a training session in which it was emphasized that the subject should speak about "what was happening" in the scene. Hence, the task was clearly defined as one in which the subject's utterances should describe *the events and actions* appearing in the scene, rather than the patient's resulting state, for example. In the experimental session, the experimenter presented a scene to the child and then asked her to talk about one of the participants in the scene. The stimuli might be as in the example below:

Experimental stimuli:
(i) videotaped cartoon scene with a boy, a girl and a baby: the boy kisses the girl;
(ii) experimenter asks to child: "Tell me about X", where X is either (a) the agent of the scene (the boy) or (b) the patient (the girl).

This experimental design tries to tap the child's knowledge of active and passive clauses by providing her with a situation in which she could use only one of the two options appropriately (as far as the adults' usage is concerned). More specifically, an *active* clause would be an appropriate answer if the topic of the situation – signalled by the experimenter's request – were the *agent*; and a *passive* clause would be appropriate if the topic were the *patient*:

Expected answer:
Child's utterance about X: (a) a simple active clause if X is the agent ("The boy kissed the girl"), or (b) a simple passive clause if X is the patient ("The girl was kissed by the boy").

Children participating in the experiment were shown 12 scenes (6 simple, and 6 complex). Each scene was shown twice, to allow for questioning both about the agent and about the patient. The last condition, *the topic patient condition*, is the only one discussed in what follows. Every subject has had, then, the opportunity of producing 24 utterances, 12 actives and 12 passives. British and Brazilian children, as well as the control adults, performed the experimental task under the same basic conditions. In (1) below, a summary of the groups of subjects is presented (number of subjects per group and average age):

(1)

Age Group	British	Brazilian
3-4 years	11 (3;9)	16 (3;5)
5-6 years	11 (5;6)	22 (5;4)
7-8 years	12 (7;7)	19 (7;6)
9-10 years	12 (9;3)	22 (9;2)
Adults	10 (36;4)	20 (28;1)

Having briefly described Gabriel's methodology, I turn now to the discussion of her findings.

3. The argument for the input-driven approach

As said before, Gabriel claims her results support the idea that properties of the *input*, like frequency, are the strongest predictors of the development of passives in a language. Let me call this the *input-driven approach*. The main argument Gabriel adduces for this approach is based on the results reported in figures 1 and 2 below (percentual figures not explicitly provided by Gabriel were estimated from her figures 3.22 and 3.23, p.112):

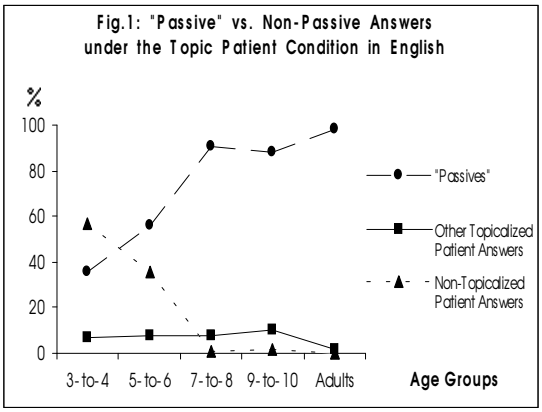
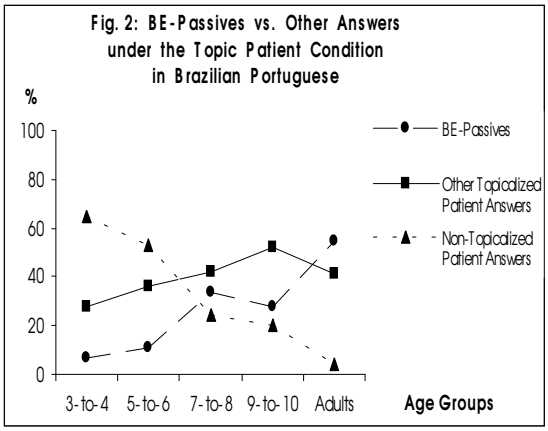


Figure 1 provides the average proportions (in percentage) of "passives" and other answers given by the English subjects when the topic chosen by the experimenter was the *patient* of the scene. The crucial observation here is that Gabriel's category "passives" in figure 1 includes *two* English constructions: passives with the auxiliary *be*, and passives with *get*. "Other topicalized patient answers" are those in which the patient was topicalized by means other than the passive construction (as in the case of left-dislocation clauses like "The girl, the boy kissed her"). Finally, "non-topic-patient answers" are answers Gabriel considered as having failed in topicalizing the patient (e.g., an active answer like "The boy kissed the girl" when the topic is the patient). [2]

Let us consider now figure 2 below, which Gabriel assumes to provide the corresponding picture in Brazilian Portuguese. It is important to observe that Brazilian Portuguese has no literal translation for English *get*-passives, only for *be*-passives ([*be* + passive participle] being translated by [*ser* + passive participle] in Brazilian Portuguese). Accordingly, Gabriel has classified as "passives" in Brazilian Portuguese only sentences corresponding to English *be*-passives (i.e., with the structure [*ser* + passive participle]); hence, the term BE-passives in figure 2, which will be adopted from now on both for English *be*-passives and for Portuguese *ser*-passives.



It is clear that, if figures 1 and 2 above provide a sound basis for comparing the development of passives in English and Brazilian Portuguese, then the only conclusion to be drawn is: different input results in different acquisition patterns, as suggested by Demuth and Allen & Crago, as well as Gabriel herself. Let us briefly see why.

According to figure 1, when British adults need to talk about a topic patient (at least in circumstances reproduced in Gabriel's experiment), they do it almost exclusively by means of "passives", that is, either by a *get*-passive or by a *be*-passive: "passives" were produced in 98% of the time. And, as expected under the input-driven approach, figure 1 also shows "passives" being produced by young speakers more often than other topicalized patient structures; this is true even for the youngest (at age 3-to-4, 36% vs. 7%). Gabriel's crucial assumption here is: the production of adults in her experiment somehow reflects the input children have access to in the acquisition of passives. In the rest of the paper, I will take this assumption for granted; but I will return to it in the final discussion.

Figure 2 shows a pattern of development of passives for Brazilian Portuguese which is quite different from the English pattern: when Brazilian adults needed to topicalize the patient, they used not only BE-passives (55%), but also other topicalized patient structures quite often (44%); and this relatively high production of non-passive structures seems to be reflected in the production of Brazilian children as well, who, unlike British children, preferred these alternatives to passives at all ages (at age 3-to-4, 28% vs. 7%).

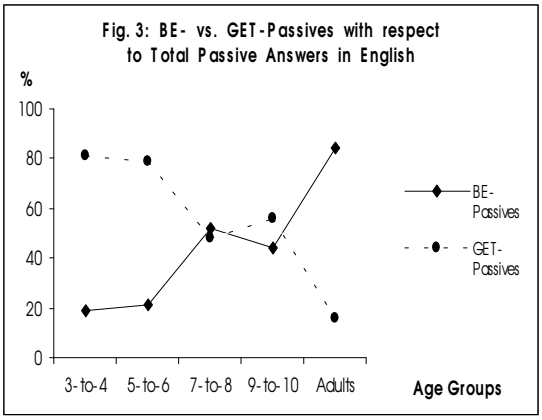
More importantly, when we compare figures 1 and 2, we can see that English children produced much more "passives" than Brazilian children (36% versus 7% at age 3-4, for example). And this seems

to reflect the input directly, since English adults also produced much more "passives" than Brazilian adults (99% versus 55%). Hence, Gabriel' s conclusion that figures 1 and 2 support Demuth and Allen & Crago' s proposal, that is, the input-driven approach to the development of passives.

4. Trouble with the input-driven approach

As pointed out, there is a crucial observation to be done about figures 1 and 2: the criteria adopted for the classification of the experimental answers in each figure are not quite the same. Specifically, the category "passives" refers to different sets of structures in the two figures – in figure 1, "passives" include *two* English structures, *be*- and *get*-passives; in figure 2, BE-passives include only *one* Portuguese structure, the one corresponding to English *be*-passives. Hence, comparing the two figures would be valid if *get*-passives were not distinct from BE-passives – that is, from English *be*-passives and Portuguese *ser*-passives – as far as language development is concerned.

However, one thing is made pretty clear both by previous literature (e.g., Marchman et al. 1991) and by Gabriel's own results: *get*-passives *are*, for some reason, different from *be*-passives with respect to language development. Specifically, *get*-passives seem to be produced much more often by children than by adults.[3] Consider Gabriel's own findings (fig. 3 below reproduces her fig. 3.8, p.76):

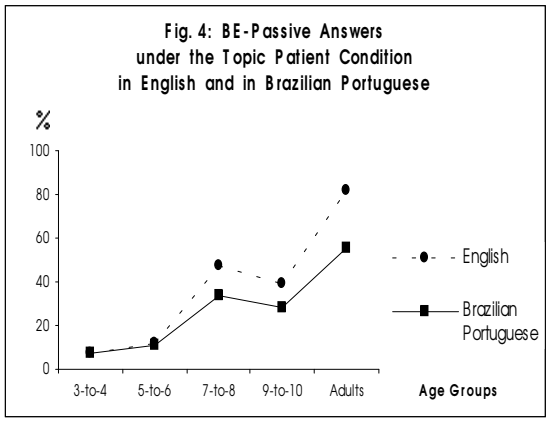


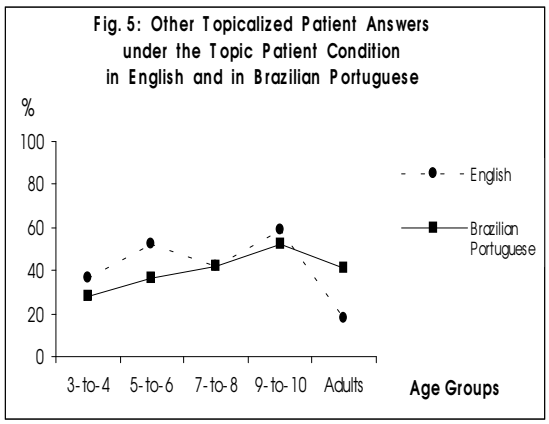
Of the total passive structures produced by British adults in the experimental circumstances described above, 84% are *be*-passives and only 16% are *get*-passives. For children, the picture is different, and basically the reverse for the youngest groups: at ages 3-4 and 5-6, about 20% of the passives produced are *be*-passives, and about 80% are *get*-passives. This shows that *be*-passives and *get*-passives cannot be considered instances of the same linguistic structure from a developmental point of view. And this developmental difference cannot be directly attributed to the input. If the high proportion of *be*-passives (versus the low proportion of *get*-passives) in the adult production is somehow reflected in the input to the children, then this input could not, by itself, be responsible for the children's preference for *get*-passives, since this preference is precisely the opposite of what the input seems to provide: adults have shown preference for *be*-passives under the same circumstances.

5. On the role of the input

As figure 3 indicates, *get*-passives should not be considered on par with *be*-passives as far as language development is concerned. Therefore, a more direct crosslinguistic comparison should first look at the developmental patterns of BE-passives alone. And *get*-passives are better seen as one of the structures English speakers might choose *as an alternative to BE-passives* for topicalizing a patient. (Probably, *get*-passives have a more especialized function, hence a more limited distribution. For example, unlike *be*-passives, *get*-passives mark the patient with additional meaning features like "being in control of action".)

In figure 4 below, I compare Gabriel's results for the development of BE-passives in English and Brazilian Portuguese, and in figure 5, for the development of other topicalized patient answers:[4]





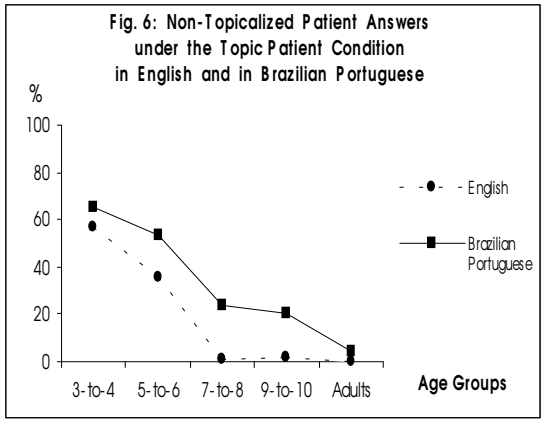
First, note that, under the same experimental circumstances, British adults produced significantly more BE-passives when compared to Brazilians

(82% versus 55%). Figure 5, in turn, shows that Brazilians used significantly more non-passive structures than English speakers for topicalizing the patient (41% versus 18%). In other words, Brazilian Portuguese seems to display a more varied set of options to topicalize the patient, and possibly this means that Brazilian Portuguese BE-passives have a more specialized function as compared to the function performed by BE-passives in English.

In any event, if the differences in adult production of topicalized patient structures shown in figures 4 and 5 are indicative of different usage in the two languages, then we may expect them to show up somehow in the input to the children; therefore, sooner or later, children should begin to reproduce these differences. But when and how?

Consider the development, shown in figure 5, of non-passive structures. Clearly, the two languages show a major contrast not only for adults, but also a consistent difference for the two youngest age groups (3-to-4 and 5-to-6 years). This contrast, however, cannot be *directly* attributed to the input – it is not a simple function of frequency, for example. British children consistently produced *more* non-passive structures than Brazilian children in the relevant age groups (differences ranging from 8% to 16%), but not because they *hear* such structures more. On the contrary, *Brazilian* adults were the ones who produced non-passive structures more often (41% of the time, versus 18% produced by British adults under the same circumstances).

Moreover, the fact that British 3-to-6 year olds produced more non-passive structures than Brazilian children of the same age cannot be attributed to a lower production of BE-passives by the British: as figure 4 shows, at these ages, production of BE-passives is about *the same* in both languages. Rather, the higher production of non-passive structures by British young children is due to another interesting fact, shown in figure 6 below:



British children consistently produced less structures Gabriel considered as "non-topicalized patient answers" as compared to Brazilian children. Assuming, with Gabriel, that such answers are, in some sense, inappropriate answers for the experimental task, the question is: why would Brazilian children seem to perform less well than the British under the topic patient condition? and why would they produce more "non-topicalized patient answers" (figure 6) and, hence, less non-passive structures to BE-passives at the youngest ages (figure 5)? Clearly, the input cannot explain this directly: such non-passive structures are, presumably, more frequent in Brazilian Portuguese than in English; moreover, Brazilian adults do not seem to perform less well than English adults (difference of 4%).

There might, however, be another input-based explanation for the apparent "underperformance" of Brazilian children. And the crucial fact might be that Brazilian Portuguese has a larger repertoire of topicalized patient structures than English, in which speakers use basically *be*-passives (as shown by the adults' production in figures 4 and 5 above). This means that Brazilian children will have to learn more alternatives for the particular discourse function Gabriel's experiment tested and, possibly, they have to find out what distinguishes the usage of these alternatives in other contexts. Thus, Brazilian children may have a more complex learning task, and need to try out a higher number of hypotheses, since their input contains a more complex set of options.

This explanation, however, does not claim any direct relationship between frequency in the input and language development. Rather, the evidence discussed seems to undermine this claim. Briefly put: (a) though Brazilian adults produced more alternative topicalized patient structures than British adults, Brazilian children do *not* produced such structures more than British children; (b) and though Brazilian adults do not seem to give "inappropriate answers" more often than British adults, Brazilian children do seem to persistently perform less well than British children. The role of the input in these patterns cannot be a simple one.

6. Regularities despite the Input

I have just argued that Gabriel's results seem to indicate that the input does play a role – though not precisely the sort of role envisaged by Demuth and Allen & Crago – in the development of topic patient structures at the earliest stages. This being the case, we might expect the input to exert some influence on the development of BE-passives at the earliest ages as well, since English and Brazilian Portuguese seem to differ as far as their input for BE-passives is concerned: British adults produce much more BE-passives than Brazilian adults in the same "context", as shown in figure 4 above.

Surprisingly, the prediction is disconfirmed, at least for the youngest children: as figure 4 also shows, though the English input is likely to differ from the Brazilian Portuguese, the youngest children studied

by Gabriel produced basically the same, low, amount of passives under the same experimental circumstances in the two languages. More precisely, 3-to-4 years old produced 7% of BE-passives in both languages, and 5-to-6 years old produced 12% in English, and 11% in Brazilian Portuguese. That is, the development of BE-passives from 3 to 6 years seems to be essentially the same in both languages, *despite the input*.[5]

This is surprising, since later developments suggest that older children *are* sensitive to the frequency of BE-passives in the input language: as we can see from figure 4, British children consistently produced more BE-passives than Brazilian children at the ages of 7-to-8 and 9-to-10 years (though the difference is small, around 10%). This indicates that, from 7 years on, children seem able to take advantage of the input, starting to grasp the different uses of BE-passives assigned by their respective languages.

Thus, for some reason, children up to the age of 6 seem to have a low performance with BE-passives, and this low performance coincides with an inability to tune in with the usage of such passives in their language – which is reflected by the youngest children's performance not being sensitive to the frequency of BE-passives in their input, apparently. This, in turn, suggests that children's *competence* with BE-passives cannot, for some reason, be effective up to the age of 6. The qualitative change in development – which can have either a source internal to the children, or an external cause in their environment – occurs between the ages of 6 and 7 in both languages.

Before proceeding, I would like to stress a point that may have submerged in the discussion: that the comparative picture of the development of passives in English and Brazilian Portuguese changes substantially once the developmental patterns for BE-passives are isolated, and the English *get*-passive is counted with the non-passive structures. If we follow Gabriel's classification of the data, what we are left with are figures 1 and 2 above, in which no interesting generalization appears in the development of passives.

If we interpret the facts as I suggested, however, a number of plausible conclusions can be drawn. First, the development of passives in the two languages looks more similar than Gabriel suggested. And it is clearly sensitive to the input, though only from the age of 7 years on. Finally, a correlation appears in Brazilian Portuguese between the use of non-passive structures by adults and the children's "underperformance" in the experimental task. I take these and the other observations as indicating that the disturbing factor in Gabriel's picture is really the English *get*-passive.

In the next section, I will provide linguistic arguments supporting this conclusion: English *be*- and *get*-passives do seem to have different grammatical structures.

7. *Get*-passives versus *be*-passives

The literature has observed a number of aspects in which *get*-passives differ from the more frequent *be*-passives in English. Most such aspects seem to point out to the fact that *be*-passives do not change the selection restrictions of the verb, while *get*-passives *add* selectional features, limiting the choice of the passive subject (see Lakoff 1971 for many of the original observations, and Meints 2000 for a brief survey).

Givón (1993), for example, observes that "a major difference between the *be*- and the *get*-passive involves the matter of control or intent (...) In the *be*-passive, the demoted agent – even when absent – is vested with purpose and control over the event. In the *get*-passive, it is the promoted patient that retains agentive control" (p. 67). This crucial difference emerges in many ways. One of them is in the interpretation and choice of subject-oriented adverbs, which assign intent to the *by*-phrase in *be*-passives, and to the passive subject in *get*-passives (examples (68) in Givón, p. 67):

(1) a. John *was* shot by Mary deliberately
[Mary acted deliberately]
b. John *got* shot by Mary deliberately
[John acted deliberately]

A similar effect is found with manner adverbs like *savagely* in (2) below: while in (2a) *savagely* refers to the way the police acted, in (2b) it must refer to the way the students acted – because the passive subject is in control of what is happening. The result, however, is an awkward sentence: you can get people doing something on you, but you can´t "get it savagely" (Givón's (61), p. 67):

(2) a. Six students *were* beaten savagely
(by the police)
b. *Six students *got* beaten savagely
(by the police)

A further consequence of the passive subject's controlling the action in *get*-passives is that the selection of infinitives, adverbial or complement, is also constrained: where the infinitival clause implies control of the participant denoted by the *by*-phrase, the *be*-passive is used; where it implies control of the passive subject, the *get* passive is used (Givón's (59), p. 67, and (63), p. 68):

(3) a. Criminals must *get/?be* arrested
[to prove their machismo]
b. Criminals must *be/?get* arrested
[to keep the streets safe]

(4) a. They told him [to *get* fired]
b. *They told him [to *be* fired]

Of course, the fact that the subject of a *get*-passive often has control over the action described imposes selectional restrictions on the subject itself: it is unlikely to be inanimate, as in (5) (Givón's (64), p. 68), and in most cases it is actually not only animate but also human, cf. in the table below (Givón's (66), p. 69): [6]

(5) a. A house can *be* built of stone, brick, or clay
b. *A house can *get* built of stone, brick, or clay

Subject Type	Be-*Passive*		Get-*Passive*	
human	240	**54%**	124	**89%**
non-human	205	46%	16	11%
Total	445	100%	140	100%

Distribution in Text of Human and Non-Human Subjects in *Be-* and *Get*-Passives (from Givón 1993)

Moreover, *get* also imposes semantic restrictions on the choice of the passive predicate itself: it cannot denote an action that could not be controlled somehow by the patient (Givón's (65), p. 68):

(6) a. John was found (by Mary) wandering on the beach
b. *John got found (by Mary) wandering on the beach

In short, the above evidence shows that, unlike *be*-passives, *get*-passives seem to impose selectional restrictions on the passive subject in addition to those imposed by the passive participle: the subject of a *get*-passive is not only the patient of the participle, but also an agent or, at least, a participant who has some control on the action denoted by the participle (in the case of animate subjects; see fn. ... above for inanimates). This, of course, explains why *get*-passives do *not* preserve the selectional restrictions of the object in the corresponding active clause, unlike *be*-passives:

(7) a. Mary found *John* wandering on the beach
b. *John* was found __ (by Mary) wandering on the beach
c. **John* got found __ (by Mary) wandering on the beach

(8) a. Mary built *her house* with bricks and stones
b. *Her house* was built __ (by Mary) with bricks and stones
c. **Her house* got built __ (by Mary) with bricks and stones

(9) a. The police beat *six students* savagely
b. *Six students* were beaten __ savagely (by the police)
c. **Six students* got beaten __ savagely (by the police)

Now, since the "agentive" role assigned to the subject of a *get*-passive cannot be assigned by the passive participle itself, it can only be assigned by the verb *get*. In other words, the "passive" subject is an *argument* of *get.*
Thus, the subject of a *get*-passive has *two* semantic roles, one assigned by the passive participle and the other assigned by *get*. Of course, this structure is quite different from that of *be*-passives, in which the passive subject is an argument of the passive participle alone, and receives no semantic role of *be*. That is, the difference between *get*- and *be*-passives appears to be analogous to the one between raising and control predicates (cf. Chomsky 1981, Haegeman 1994). This suggests that *get* passives have the structure in (10a):

(10) a. *Get*-Passive:
John got [*PRO* shot by Mary deliberately]
b. *Be*-Passive:
John was [_*t*_ shot by Mary deliberately]

If the structures in (10) are correct, *get*-passives do not involve A-movement of the "passive" subject; therefore, they would not pose the same problems *be*-passives impose to children, under Borer & Wexler's hypothesis. [7] Let me add that Brazilian Portuguese BE-passives are just like English *be*-passives in all relevant respects; in particular, they do not impose additional selectional restrictions on the passive subject.

8. Conclusion

Let us return to the main issue of this paper, namely, whether Gabriel's findings support the input-driven approach to the development of passives, or Borer & Wexler's maturation hypothesis. Recall that this hypothesis is about "syntactic" passives – those in which the patient is promoted to subject position by means of "movement", as BE-passives in English and Portuguese. According to Borer & Wexler, "syntactic" passives take some time to develop and do so more or less uniformly across languages because the grammatical operation of "movement" undergoes biological maturation (cf. Borer & Wexler 1987; see also Borer & Wexler 1992 and Babyonishev et al. 2000). The input-driven approach, on the other hand, assumes that there is a direct relation between frequency in the input and language development: if a construction C is more frequent in language X than in language Y, then C should be acquired first in X. That is, crosslinguistic differences in the frequency of a construction should correlate with non-uniformity in the development of this construction. The question is: which of the two approaches is supported by the evidence collected by Gabriel?

It seems to me clear that Gabriel's developmental data is quite compatible with Borer & Wexler's maturation hypothesis. As we have seen, BE-passives – that is, passives involving A-movement – do seem to develop quite uniformly in English and Brazilian Portuguese up to some age (around 6). And *apparently* this happens *despite the input* – BE-passives seem to have different frequencies in adult English and in adult Brazilian Portuguese. If, for reasons of maturation, children do not possess the ability to analyze certain grammatical constructions properly – those involving A-movement, according to Borer & Wexler –, then it makes perfect sense they will show a more or less uniform poor performance in such constructions across languages. Moreover, it also makes sense that, as soon as the relevant cognitive ability becomes biologically available, then children can make use of the input and advance towards their adult target grammar. This would explain why the major developmental change in English and Brazilian Portuguese happens at the same age (around 7 years), and why precisely at this point children seem to become sensitive to the frequency of BE-passives in their respective languages.[8]

The input-driven approach, on the other hand, would seem to face a number of difficulties, at least in the particular version proposed by Demuth and Allen & Crago, and adopted by Gabriel. In this version, frequency in the input is directly related to frequency in child speech. This approach cannot explain why BE-passives have the same developmental pattern up to age 6, despite the fact that the English input seems to differ quite substantially from the Brazilian Portuguese input as far as BE-passives are concerned (82% vs. 55% in adult language, cf. figure 4 above). It cannot explain why English young children produce structures that are an alternative to BE-passives more often than Brazilian children (e.g., 52% vs. 36% at age 5-6), when those structures are much more frequent in the Brazilian Portuguese input (41% vs. 18% in English; see figure 5). Finally, the input-driven approach cannot explain why Brazilian children seem to perform less well than British children in the topic patient condition, producing more "inappropriate" experimental answers quite consistently (65% vs. 57% at age 3-4, 53% vs. 36% at age 5-6, and even bigger differences for older children): there seems to be no strong difference between Brazilian and English adults as far as such "inappropriate" answers are concerned (4% and 0%, respectively; see figure 6 above).

As far as Gabriel's main findings are concerned, then, it appears that the evidence is in favor of the idea that the development of "syntactic" passives is more or less uniform across languages, and against the idea that it is a direct reflex of their frequency in the input. Note, however, that the discussion so far has taken for granted a plausible assumption made by Gabriel herself: that the pattern of answers provided by the *adult* subjects in Gabriel's experiment does reflect the *input* to the children in some measure. In other words, the quantitative differences found in the experimental performance of British and Brazilian adults would also appear in the speech directed to children during the acquisition process. This is plausible, but it is not the only logical possibility.

Note, for example, that it is around the age of 6 and 7 that children become literate in England and in Brazil. That is, it is around this age that the written language begins to be taught to children, and this possibly affects their linguistic input quite substantially. Now, suppose the major differences in the distribution of BE-passives in English and in Brazilian Portuguese are a matter of written language. And suppose the adults' performance in Gabriel's experiment reflects their formal written language rather than the colloquial spoken language directed to children. If these assumptions were correct, *the input might explain the patterns of development of BE-passives* found by Gabriel in English and Brazilian Portuguese. They would have a similar development in both languages up to the age of 6 years, and the input would begin to play a role only after, for one simple reason: only after the age of 6, when children's exposition to written language begins, the relevant differences between (written!) English and Brazilian Portuguese would show up in the input.

Of course, the two explanations here considered – Borer & Wexler's maturational hypothesis and the input-driven alternative just suggested – make quite different predictions with respect to many phenomena (e.g., about the speech directed to children); hence, they can be tested. As far as I am aware though, the relevant data have not been looked at from this perspective so far, and further research must be carried to determine the best interpretation for Gabriel's evidence.

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Notes

[1] See Gabriel (2001) for the relevance of this condition. Here, it will be ignored, and results refer to utterances produced both in simple and complex scenes. It should also be noticed that all scenes depicted "highly transitive" actions (Hopper & Thompson 1980): the agent was clearly in control of the action, the action performed to the end, and the patient clearly affected. Thus, Gabriel's production experiment was not designed to study children's difficulties with non-actional passives, an issue she addressed in her comprehension experiment. See also Pinker *et al.* (1997).

[2] Such answers are of two types: (a) active clauses (e.g., in a scene where a boy kissed a girl, asked to speak about the girl, the child said: "The boy kissed the girl"; (b) utterances that do not describe the events and actions shown in the scene (e.g., in the same situation previously described, the child said: "The girl is in love with the boy"). Note that, specially in the case (b), it is clear that the child may have failed in the task of describing the events and actions of the scene, but it is not so clear whether she also failed in topicalizing the patient.

[3] Budwig (1990) has found two young children who produced more *be*-passives than *get*-passives. And Meints (2000) has conducted an experiment in which British young children also seem to have produced more *be*-passives than *get*-passives. These results, however, do not conform to most findings reported in the literature, as Meints herself discusses.

[4] Though figures 4, 5 and also 6 below are based on the results provided in Gabriel (2001), they do not correspond to any particular figure given by her. Rather, figures 4, 5 and 6 organize in a different way information and data extracted from Gabriel's own figures and text. In particular, figure 4 does *not* correspond to Gabriel's figures 3.20 and 3.21 (p.104): percentages in figure 4 (and also in figures 5 and 6) are relative to *all answers* under the topic patient condition; in Gabriel's figures percentages are relative to *all topicalized patient answers* given under the same condition. See fn. 7 below for discussion. The categories in figures 4, 5 and 6 are like in previous figures, except that English *get*-passives are now counted as "other topicalized patient answers".

[5] Gabriel compares the development of BE-passives in English and Brazilian Portuguese in her figures 3.20 and 3.21, p.104, which show a pattern slightly different from the one shown in figure 4 above. This is so because figure 4 above is based on the proportion of BE-passives with respect to *all answers* under the topic patient condition, while Gabriel's figures are based on the proportion of BE-passives with respect to *all topicalized patient answers* (cf. fn. 5 above). Gabriel's figures suggest a picture even more puzzling for the input-driven approach: the production of BE-passives is almost the same in the two languages *at all ages*, except for the adults, apparently showing that children *at no age* are sensitive to the input!

[6] The subject of a *get*-passive can be inanimate, but then either it is implied that there is some animate participant related to it who can retain control on the action, or the subject itself is implied to have been "adversely affected" (as in "how did this window get broken?"). In either case, additional selectional restrictions are imposed on the passive's subject, too. See Givón (1993: 69-70).

[7] Fox & Grodzinsky (1998) argued that *get*-passives do involve A-movement of the passive subject. Their arguments are two: there are *get*-passives with idiom chunks, as in (i) below, and the surface subject of the auxiliary *get* can be an expletive, as in (ii):

(i) *Tabs* always get __ kept on foreigners in the USA

(ii) *There* finally got __ to be a lot of room in this house

I have nothing to say with respect to (i). It is interesting, however, that the expletive examples are not with passives, but with existentials. The crucial examples for Fox & Grodzinsky's argument would be like in (iii) and (iv) below, which seem to me to be unacceptable:

(iii) It *got* believed that Mary is innocent

(iv) Mary *got* believed __ to be innocent

Fox & Grodzinsky provide no explicit explanation for the additional selectional restrictions imposed by *get*-passives as those discussed in this paper, but suggest in their fn. 6, p. 314-5, that some such restrictions might have to do with aspectual properties of *get*. In fn. 8, p. 315, they discuss a possibility raised by a reviewer: that *get* is actually lexically ambiguous, being both a raising and a control verb. But they reject it saying that *be* might be too, concluding: "In either case, the claim of lexical ambiguity would require evidence". Note, however, that while there *is* paradoxical evidence for *get*-passives, there is no such evidence for *be*-passives.

[8] This is not meant to say that the maturational hypothesis explains everything in the acquisition of passives, or that it does not raise problems of its own. To begin with, I will shortly suggest that there is an alternative interpretation of the facts that might lead to an input-driven explanation of the development of passives in English and Brazilian Portuguese. This and other issues must, of course, be addressed.