# Some thoughts on Balto-Finnic passives and impersonals

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Abstract

This working paper focuses on the question of whether the Balto-Finnic impersonal construction can be classified as active or passive. We contrast it with the criteria for impersonal active constructions, listed in Blevins (2003): non-promotion to subject position, retention of object case marking, non-agreement between the preverbal element and the finite verb, indefinite human interpretation of the implied agent, the ability of the implicit subject to bind reflexives, and the ability of the construction to combine with the oblique agent phrase. We show that these characteristics are not valid for the Balto-Finnic impersonal. However, they correctly describe another construction, often referred to as the 'zero-person' construction.

## 1   Introduction

In recent literature, the true nature of the Balto-Finnic 'impersonal' construction has been subject to debate. While Erelt (2003), Manninen & Nelson (2004) and Vihman (2002) treat it as a passive voice form (an impersonal passive), Blevins (2003) has proposed that it is an active impersonal form. We argue that a reclassification of the Balto-Finnic impersonal passive as an active impersonal form is questionable: the construction displays a number of properties that are typical of a passive formed by argument deletion. These properties are unexpected if we are dealing with an impersonal which is formed by argument suppression and has a syntactically active covert subject. We further argue that Balto-Finnic has another class of constructions, called the 'zero person' or the 'missing person' construction, which can be captured much better by the criteria for impersonals posited in Blevins (2003).

We begin by discussing some properties of passives and passivisation, and by introducing the Balto-Finnic 'passive' briefly (section 2). Next, we assess the motivation for claiming that, rather than a passive, the Balto-Finnic construction is a subjectless impersonal (section 3). We then apply the criteria for active impersonals to the 'zero person' construction (section 4), and summarise the main points in the discussion (section 5).

## 2   Passivisation vs. Impersonalisation

In classic generative theories (e.g. Chomsky 1957) passivisation is viewed as a morphosyntactic operation on an input sentence (1a) which does not alter propositional content:

(1)   a. The princess   kissed     the frog.
          NP1             V          NP2
      b. The frog      was        kissed  (by the princess).
          NP2           AUX        V-EN   (by NP1)

In (1), the underlying object (NP2) is raised to surface subject, while the underlying subject (NP1) is demoted. The underlying subject may still be expressed in the form of an oblique agent phrase, if the language in question allows such phrases.

   Besides promotion and demotion, a key property of passives cross-linguistically is that they are usually morphologically marked in contrast to active voice forms (Siewierska 1984, Keenan 1985). Passives may be formed with special marking (e.g. affixation) on the lexical verb, or periphrastically, with the help of auxiliaries. Swedish is a language that makes use of both processes:[1]

(2)   a. De            valde      henne     till   ordförande.
          they.NOM     selected   she.ACC   for    chairperson
          'They selected her the chairperson.'
      b. Hon           valde-s             till   ordförande.
          she.NOM      selected-PASS       for    chairperson
          'She was selected the chairperson.'
      c. Hon           blev  /  var    vald              till   ordförande.
          she.NOM      became/  was    selected.PRTC     for    chairperson
          'She became/was selected the chairperson.'

Swedish has two passive auxiliaries: *bli* 'become' and *vara* 'be'. According to e.g. Thorell (1973: 135ff.) the morphological passive (2b) emphasizes the action denoted by the verb, while the periphrastic constructions (2c) focus on the event as a whole (*bli*) or on the end result (*vara*).

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[1]  The following abbreviations will be used: ACC=accusative; ADE=adessive; ALL=allative; COM=comitative; ELA=elative; ESS=essive; GEN=genitive; ILL=illative; IMPS=impersonal passive; INE=inessive; INF=infinitival form; INS=instructive; NOM=nominative; PART=partitive; PASS=passive; PERF=perfective participle; PRTC=participial form; 3PX=third person anaphoric suffix; SUP=supine; TRA=translative.

## 2.1 Personal and impersonal passives

Languages that have passives may have more than one type of passive construction. For example, Keenan (1985) talks about a 'basic' passive, while Siewierska (1984) distinguishes between 'personal' and 'impersonal' passives. Personal passives are in many languages associated with transitive verbs: the underlying subject is deleted, and the underlying direct object is promoted to surface subject. It is assigned nominative case and triggers (full or partial) agreement on the finite verb. Impersonal passives are often associated with intransitive verbs:[2] as the underlying subject is deleted and there is no object to promote, the sentences end up being verb-initial (if the language allows such constructions) or introduced by an expletive or a locative/temporal adverbial. The preverbal element may retain its original case marking and does not trigger agreement on the verb. This has been taken to show that it has remained a non-subject, i.e. that promotion to subject has not occurred (Blevins 2003: 478). We use the German examples (3) and (4) (from Blevins 2003: 477) to illustrate both types of passives. They also show how the deleted underlying subject can resurface as an oblique agent phrase:

(3) a. Der      Beamte   hat  den      Vorschlag   abgelehnt.
       the.NOM official  has  the.ACC  proposal    rejected
       'The official has rejected the proposal.'
    b. Der      Vorschlag  wurde  (vom        Beamten)   abgelehnt.
       the.NOM  proposal   was    (by+the.DAT official)  rejected
       'The proposal was rejected by the official.'
(4) a. Viele Leute    haben  in der  Küche     geraucht.
       many people    have   in the  kitchen   smoked
       'Many people have smoked in the kitchen.'
    b. In der Küche     wurde  (von   vielen  Leuten)  geraucht.
       In the kitchen   was    (by    many    people)  smoked
       'There was smoking by many people in the kitchen.'

We return to the status of preverbal elements in section 3.

## 2.2 Subject deletion vs subject suppression

One of the key issues in the literature is the types of verbs that can passivise. Perlmutter (1978) has argued that only verbs that have an underlying 'logical' subject can serve as input to passivisation, whereas verbs that lack a 'logical'

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[2] It is not always the case that transitive verbs serve as input to personal, intransitive verbs to impersonal, passivisation. In Estonian and Swedish, for example, impersonal passives can be formed of both transitive and intransitive verbs.

subject – unaccusative intransitives being a case in point – cannot serve as the input. Perlmutter's claim is based on languages like German and Dutch where indeed only the former kinds of verbs can passivise; compare the German data in (4) with that in (5) (from Blevins 2003: 478):

(5)  a. Viele Leute    sind in der  Küche    geblieben.
        many people   are  in the   kitchen   remained
        'Many people have remained in the kitchen.'
     b. *In der  Küche      wurde (von    vielen Leuten)  geblieben.
         in  the  kitchen    was   (by      many people)   remained
        'There was remaining by many people in the kitchen.'

Several authors, including Perlmutter & Postal (1984) and Blevins (2003: 475f.), treat passivisation as an operation which detransitivises verbs by deleting their 'logical' subjects. Passivisation of a transitive yields a derived intransitive whose underlying object is promoted to subject (3), while passivisation of an unergative intransitive yields a subjectless output (4). Passivisation cannot apply to unaccusative intransitives (5), because they have no 'logical' subjects to delete.

However, in a number of languages, even verbs that lack a 'logical' subject seem to passivise. Compare the German (5b) with the Estonian (6):[3]

(6)     Eestis  ei   jäädud              ootama,    siin
        E.INE  neg  remain.PAST.IMPS   wait.SUP   here

        hakati              tegutsema.
        start.PAST.IMPS    act.SUP
        'In Estonia one did not remain waiting, here one started to act.'
                                                          (www.eki.ee/corpus)

Manninen & Nelson (2004) argue that data as in (6) can still be analysed as passives: contra Perlmutter and related work, they treat passivisation as an operation that prevents the highest argument in the construction from being licensed (i.e. the highest v head is provided with a feature [passive] which interferes with the v's selectional properties and so prevents an argument from being licensed in its Spec,vP position). In the case of transitives and unergative intransitives, the highest argument is a 'logical' subject, while in the case of unaccusative intransitives, Manninen & Nelson argue, it is a 'logical' object.

The reasons for treating data in (6) as subjectless impersonals in Blevins (2003: 475f.) are that they are created by an operation which suppresses the syntactic realisation of a surface subject, without affecting the argument

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[3] We gloss all morphological 'passive' forms in our Estonian and Finnish examples as 'impersonal passive' (IMPS) forms.

structure of the input verb. Impersonalisation of a transitive therefore yields a subjectless transitive whose object may still even carry object case, while impersonalisation of an unergative intransitive yields a subjectless output. As impersonalisation does not affect argument structure, it has been claimed, it can apply to nearly all classes of verbs, including unaccusative and copular verbs (e.g. Blevins 2003: 514f.). Before looking at the reasons for treating data as in (6) as subjectless impersonals, we will introduce the Balto-Finnic construction briefly. We will continue to use the term 'passive' because this is the term normally used in the literature, and because we believe that the construction is a passive.

## 2.3 What do Balto-Finnic 'passives' look like?

Estonian is usually thought to have both personal and impersonal passive constructions (e.g. Rajandi 1999, Vihman 2001, 2002, 2004, and Hiietam 2003). The personal passives are formed periphrastically, by means of the auxiliary *olema* 'be' followed by the passive participle. The impersonal passives are formed by affixation of the morphemes *–dakse/-takse/-akse* or *–ti/-di* signalling non-past and past tense, respectively.[4] The data in (7)-(8) show that transitive verbs can serve as input to both personal and impersonal passivisation, while intransitive verbs only serve as input to impersonal passivisation:

(7) a. Aga kogemata lugesin ühe luuletuse läbi ...
   but by.accident read.PAST.1SG one.ACC poem.ACC through
   'But accidentally I read through one poem...'          (www.eki.ee/corpus/)
   b. Luuletus oli läbi loetud.          [personal passive]
   poem.NOM be.3SG through read.PRTC
   'The poem was read through.'
   c. Luuletus loeti läbi.          [impersonal passive]
   poem.NOM read.PAST.IMPS through
   'One read the poem through.'

(8) a. Toolile hüppas ta kähku.
   chair.ALL jump.PAST.3SG he/she.NOM quickly
   'He jumped on the chair quickly.'
   b. *On hüpatud kähku.
   be.3SG jump.PRTC quickly
   c. Toolile hüpati kähku.
   chair.ALL jump.PAST.IMPS quickly
   'One jumped on the chair quickly.'

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[4] The form of the affix is determined by the form of the stem, i.e. the number of syllables and whether the stem ends in a voiced or unvoiced consonant or in a vowel. For examples and discussion, the reader is referred to e.g. Viitso (2003: 54f.).

The preverbal position in an Estonian impersonal passive may remain empty, or be filled by various kinds of elements, including the underlying object (7c) or a locative/temporal adverbial (8c) – we will return to this in section 3. In contrast to personal passives (7b), the preverbal element in an impersonal passive fails to trigger agreement on the finite verb.

Although Finnish has forms that correspond to the Estonian personal passive (7b) their status as a passive is subject to debate.[5] Consequently, most Finnish passive constructions are classified as impersonal – see e.g. Siewierska (1984: 98f.), Vilkuna (1996: 143ff.), Manninen & Nelson (2004) and the references cited therein. In the non-past and past tense, the Finnish impersonal passive is formed morphologically, by affixation of *–taan* or *–tiin*, while in the perfect tenses, it is formed periphrastically, by means of the auxiliary *olla* 'be' followed by the passive participle.[6] (9)-(10) show that both transitive and intransitive verbs can serve as the input. Like in Estonian, the preverbal position may remain empty, or it may be filled by various types of elements, including the underlying object and a locative or temporal adverbial. The preverbal element also fails to trigger person and number agreement on the finite verb:

(9)  a. Vahingossa      luin              runon        läpi.
        by accident     read.PAST.1SG    poem.ACC     through
        'Accidentally I read the poem through.'
     b. Runo            luettiin          läpi.
        poem.NOM   read.PAST.IMPS    through
        'The poem was read through.'
(10) a. Hän             hyppäsi           nopeasti   tuolille.
        he/she.NOM   jump.PAST.3SG    quickly    chair.ALL
        'He jumped on the chair quickly.'
     b. Tuolille   hypättiin           nopeasti.
        chair.ALL  jump.PAST.IMPS    quickly
        'On the chair it was jumped quickly.'

As noted in section 2, even verbs lacking 'logical' subjects seem to undergo passivisation in Balto-Finnic. If passivisation is seen as an operation that targets the highest argument in the construction (see e.g. Manninen & Nelson 2004), then a passive analysis of such data is still available. The fact that the verbs are morphologically marked in contrast to active verb forms may even be taken to

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[5] Many grammarians classify forms corresponding to the Estonian (7b) as examples of a predicative adjective construction. Vilkuna (2004) presents arguments for classifying them as personal passives, however. As our paper will focus on the status of the Finnish and Estonian impersonal passive as a 'passive' we will not discuss the status of these forms any further.
[6] The Finnish morphemes *–taan* and *–tiin* can have various forms, due to phenomena like consonant gradation and vowel harmony. For examples and discussion, the reader is referred to e.g. Karlsson (1982: 170f.), Laaksonen & Lieko (1992: 87) and Ikola (2002: 56).

support a passive analysis for such constructions (i.e. the passive morpheme may be seen as an overt realisation of a feature [passive] on a relevant v head). However, if passivisation is an operation that targets only 'logical' subjects (Perlmutter 1978, Blevins 2003), then a passive analysis is unavailable. Blevins (2003: 482f.) goes a step further and argues that even data like (7c), (8c), (9b) and (10b), i.e. even constructions which have a 'logical' subject available to delete, cannot be analysed as passives in Balto-Finnic. In section 3, we will look at reasons why the construction in question has been classified as an impersonal active and not a passive form (e.g. Blevins 2003).

# 3    Subjectless Impersonals or Passives?

Below we discuss the criteria that have been proposed for impersonal active constructions in Blevins (2003: 482f) and apply it to the Balto-Finnic construction. We begin by discussing the claim that there is no promotion to subject (section 3.1), and the underlying direct object retains its structural object case (section 3.2). We then address the fact that the preverbal element does not trigger agreement on the finite verb (section 3.3), and comment on the tendency of the implied argument to receive human interpretations (section 3.4). Next, we discuss the claim that there is a syntactically active covert subject: we look at both reflexive pronouns and other anaphora (section 3.5), as well as oblique agent phrases (section 3.6). Finally, we summarise the main points in the discussion (section 3.7).

## 3.1  Promotion to surface subject

As discussed in section 2.2, some authors consider passivisation to delete an underlying 'logical' subject, while impersonalisation suppresses a surface subject. However, as intransitive constructions yield subjectless forms in both cases, this difference may be difficult to capture. In transitive constructions the situation is clear, however: passivisation yields a derived intransitive, impersonalisation a subjectless form. Blevins (2003: 482) goes as far as stating that in impersonalisation 'there can be no promotion to subject' since otherwise the output would not be a subjectless form.

In section 2.3 we have seen that in Balto-Finnic, the preverbal position may either remain empty or be filled by various types of elements, including the underlying object and a locative/temporal adverbial. Although verb-initial sentences may seem to support the idea that we are dealing with a subjectless form, the truth is that this word order is only available under special circumstances: to create a contrastive effect (e.g. to emphasize the assertion made by the sentence – speaker A may have claimed that bubbled wine was not drunk at the party and speaker B wants to deny this claim), or to give the sentence a specific pragmatic effect; see e.g. Erelt (2003) for Estonian and

Vilkuna (1989), Holmberg & Nikanne (2002: 82f.), Kaiser (2004) for Finnish. This suggests that in data like (11b) and (12b) we are dealing with more than just subject suppression (i.e. that there is movement of the verb to a contrastive projection within the CP-domain):[7]

(11) a. Inimesed    jõid              peol          vahuveini.
         people.NOM drink.PAST.3PL    party.ADE     bubbled.wine.PART
         'People drank bubbled wine at the party.'
     b. Joodi             küll      vahuveini          peol.
         drink.PAST.IMPS  indeed    bubbled.wine.PART  party.ADE
         'Bubbled wine was indeed drunk at the party.'
(12) a. Ihmiset          joivat          kuohuviiniä          juhlissa.
         People.NOM       drink.PAST.3PL  bubbled.wine.PART    party.INE
         'People drank bubbled wine at the party.'
     b. Juotiin           kuohuviiniä          juhlissa.
         drink.PAST.IMPS  bubbled.wine.PART    party.INE
         'Bubbled wine was indeed drunk at the party.'

In the literature, the possibility of the preverbal elements being surface subjects in data like (6) has been rejected, on grounds that they retain their original case marking and do not trigger agreement on the finite verb (Blevins 2003: 478, 482). Before discussing case marking and agreement phenomena in sections 3.2 and 3.3 we look at the notion of a 'surface subject' in Balto-Finnic.

   Various authors, including Vilkuna (1989), Erelt et al. (1993), Kiss (1995, 1997) and Holmberg & Nikanne (2002), have shown that a surface subject position may be associated with different properties and host different kinds of elements in different languages. In subject-prominent languages, like English, a surface subject position must be filled by an underlying subject 'in the sense of a thematically highest argument,' while in topic-prominent languages, like Estonian and Finnish, it may be filled by 'any category capable of functioning as a topic' (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002: 78).[8] Whether a language is subject- or topic-prominent has consequences for word order. The English (13a) is well-formed because the surface subject position is filled by the thematically highest argument, but (13b) is ill-formed (if the professor is the entity getting eaten) because this position is filled by a lower argument. However, because in topic-prominent languages the surface subject position is first and foremost a topic position which may be filled by any category capable of functioning as a topic, the Estonian and Finnish examples are equally well-formed and only differ with

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[7] Note that in Estonian, this pragmatic effect requires not only the verb initial word order but also the presence of an emphasising particle (*küll* 'indeed').

[8] A 'topic' within H&N's work is the element containing the given information in the discourse, and 'any category capable of functioning as a topic' is a category that is referential in the broad sense, including locative/temporal adverbials.

regard to information structure. In (14a) and (15a), the professor is new information, while in (14b) and (15b) it is part of the presupposition (given information):

(13) a. The lion ate the professor.
　　b. *The professor ate the lion.
(14) a. Lõvi　　　sõi　　　　　　professor　　ära.
　　　 lion.NOM eat.PAST.3SG　professor.ACC PERF
　　　 'The lion ate the professor.'
　　b. Professori　　sõi　　　　　　lõvi.
　　　 professor.ACC eat.PAST.3SG　　lion.NOM
　　　 'It was the lion that ate the professor.'
(15) a. Leijona　　　söi　　　　　　professorin.
　　　 lion.NOM　　eat.PAST.3SG　professor.ACC
　　　 'The lion ate the professor.'
　　b. Professorin　　söi　　　　　leijona.
　　　 professor.ACC eat.PAST.3SG　lion.NOM
　　　 'It was the lion that ate the professor.'

Previous work by e.g. Vilkuna (1989, 1995), Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) and Manninen & Nelson (2004) has shown that the subject topics in (14a) and (15a) appear in the same structural position as the non-subject topics in (14b) and (15b). Holmberg & Nikanne (2002) have also provided an account of the fact that in (14b) and (15b), the verb continues to agree with the underlying subject in the postverbal position. Similar ideas are pursued also elsewhere – see e.g. Chomsky's (2000, 2001) proposal that agreement features can be checked without movement to a specific structural position (in this case, movement to a surface subject position).

　　Assuming, in line with the previous work, that 'promotion to subject' in Balto-Finnic is really movement of a 'topic' to a specific structural position, and that this movement need not be linked to case and agreement phenomena, we argue that data like (14b) and (15b) cannot be treated as subjectless forms in these languages (we also feel that the term subjectless is misleading: a better term would be topicless form). A further problem for Blevins' assumption that 'promotion to subject' is closely linked to case and agreement in Balto-Finnic is posed by the existence of data like (16b). In such examples, the preverbal position is occupied by a locative adverbial. The underlying subject (a thematic agent) appears in a postverbal position: it inflects for partitive case and fails to trigger agreement on the finite verb. This shows that even in the active, there is no link between the 'surface subject' position and case and agreement phenomena in these languages:

(16) a. Pihalla          leikkivät          lapset.
      garden.ADE     play.PAST.3PL  children.NOM
      'It was the children that were playing in the garden.'
    b. Pihalla       leikki            lapsia.
      garden.INE   play.PAST.3SG  children.PART
      'There were some children playing in the garden'

Our overall conclusion is, then, that 'promotion to subject' in Balto-Finnic is really promotion to topic. In line with the previous work we assume that all elements capable of functioning as topics – i.e. subjects and non-subjects alike – are promoted to the same structural position: in want of a better term, we refer to this as the preverbal 'subject/topic' position. We therefore assume that case and agreement are not necessary properties of the Balto-Finnic 'subject/topic' position. These conclusions cover both active and passive data: we argue that the preverbal elements in (6) have undergone promotion to 'subject/topic' in the same way as the preverbal elements in (14b), (15b) and (16b) have. Like these other non-subject topics, they have retained their original case marking and fail to trigger agreement on the finite verb.

## 3.2  Case marking

As noted above, the preverbal position in the Balto-Finnic construction may be filled by various types of elements which retain their original case marking. However, all the examples discussed so far have involved lexically assigned cases, whereas one of the main arguments for treating the Balto-Finnic construction as a subjectless impersonal is that even underlying direct objects retain their structural 'objective cases, such as accusative or partitive' (Blevins 2003: 482). This has lead to claims that the Balto-Finnic construction patterns syntactically with synthetic verb forms that incorporate a subject argument.

    Data like the Estonian (17b) show, however, that full object NPs do undergo accusative-nominative case alternation under passivisation:

(17) a. Lugesin          ühe           luuletuse      läbi.
      read.PAST.1SG one.ACC   poem.ACC    through
      'I read through one poem'
    b. Luuletus     loeti             läbi.
      poem.NOM   read.PAST.IMPS    through
      'One read the poem through.'

Finnish personal pronouns are in fact the only types of object NPs that retain their accusative case under passivisation. Sometimes even they become marked with nominative case (Lehtinen 1985):[9]

(18)  a. Näin            hänet.
          saw.PAST.1SG  him/her.ACC
          'I saw him/her.'
      b. Hänet      /  hän          nähtiin.
          he/she.ACC  /  he/she.NOM  see.PAST.IMPS
          'He/she was seen.'

The retention of accusative case in personal pronouns has been explained as an ergative split in Finnish: this means that certain classes of arguments may be marked like direct objects in typical subject-case environments, depending on features such as animacy. For more discussion, see e.g. Moravcsik (1978), Itkonen (1979), Kiparsky (1998), and Nelson (1998).

 Blevins (2003: 482) correctly observes that underlying object NPs retain their partitive case under passivisation. In (19b) we give an example from Finnish:

(19)  a. Minä  söin           kakkua       sormin.
          I.NOM  eat.PAST.1SG  cake.PART    fingers.INS
          'I ate some cake with my fingers.'
          'I was eating cake with my fingers.'
      b. Kakkua     syötiin          sormin.
          cake.PART  eat.PAST.IMPS  fingers.INS
          '(Some) cake was eaten with fingers.'
          'Cake was being eaten with fingers.'

Based on previous work, the Balto-Finnic partitive case seems to be conditioned by aspectual semantics at the VP-level and/or by NP-semantics, including factors such as definiteness and quantitative limitedness of the object NP or/and the telicity of the event or activity expressed by the lexical verb. Mainly, partitive objects occur in atelic constructions or in environments where the NP is quantitatively unlimited (indefinite), whereas accusative objects occur in telic constructions and/or when the NP is limited (definite). Partitive case is also lexically assigned by many verbs, including those expressing mental states and cognition or physical impact. This phenomenon has been discussed extensively in the past – see e.g. Klaas (1999), Hiietam (2003) for Estonian and Heinämäki (1984), Vainikka (1989), Kiparsky (1998), Nelson (1998) for Finnish. Our conclusion therefore is that partitive case is associated with mainly semantic

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[9] In Estonian, personal pronouns show variable case marking: first and second person pronouns show accusative-partitive alternation, while third person pronouns show accusative-nominative alternation. These facts also suggest that the objective case is not preserved under passivisation.

factors, and therefore it cannot be said to automatically exclude a passive analysis for the Balto-Finnic construction.[10]

Another reason for claiming that the Balto-Finnic construction is an impersonal active form is that it 'patterns syntactically with synthetic verb forms which incorporate a subject argument (e.g. Blevins 2003: 482).' However, as shown by the Estonian example in (20), such synthetic verb forms are usually marked for the person and number of the subject argument, which may be optionally overtly expressed:

(20)    (Ma)      läksin          koju.
        (I.NOM)   go.PAST.1SG     home.ILL
        'I went home.'

If the Balto-Finnic passive patterned syntactically with an incorporating construction, we would expect its subject argument to also be optionally overtly expressed. But as shown by the Finnish (21b-c) this leads to ill-formedness:[11]

(21) a. Lapsi          pantiin          vuoteeseen.
        child.NOM      put.PAST.IMPS    bed.ILL
        'The child was put to bed.'
     b. *He            lapsi        pantiin          vuoteeseen.
        they.NOM       child.NOM    put.PAST.IMPS    bed.ILL
     c. *Joku          lapsi        pantiin          vuoteeseen.
        someone.NOM    child.NOM    put.PAST.IMPS    bed.ILL

Summarising the discussion so far, none of the arguments against a passive analysis for Balto-Finnic can be considered valid: first, full NP objects undergo standard accusative-nominative case alternation in these languages. Second, the retention of partitive case is semantically determined and cannot be used as a straightforward indication of retained object status. Finally, empirical evidence suggests that impersonal passive forms do not pattern syntactically with active synthetic incorporating verbs.

## 3.3  Default agreement

In section 2.3 we observed that the preverbal element in the Balto-Finnic construction does not trigger agreement on the finite verb. In Blevins (2003: 478), this has been considered further evidence to show that the preverbal

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[10] Note also that partitive case is not exclusively an object case: data like (16b) show that even many underlying SUBJECTS can surface in the partitive case, when their meaning is indefinite.

[11] (21b-c) would not become well-formed even if the NP *child* was in the accusative case and/or appeared in a postverbal position. The reader should avoid misparsing (21c) as *[Some child] was put to bed*.

element has remained a non-subject (i.e. that 'promotion to subject' has not occurred). In section 3.1 we illustrated, however, that the notion of promotion and 'surface subjects' is problematic for Balto-Finnic, and that agreement cannot be used as a test for movement to a preverbal 'subject/topic' position in these languages.

The lack of agreement between the preverbal element and the passive finite verb is, in fact, nothing unusual. Keenan (1985: 255f.) has observed that cross-linguistically, passives exhibit very different agreement patterns from the corresponding active constructions: for example, the finite verb may fail to agree with its 'subject' altogether; it may display a different set of agreement affixes from the corresponding active verb; it may agree with its 'subject' as if it was a direct object in an active construction; or it may agree with both the 'subject' and the agent phrase. Siewierska (1984: 99) has argued that agreement is a property that is typically associated with personal – but not impersonal – passives. These observations suggest, then, that the lack of agreement in the Balto-Finnic construction indeed cannot be taken as evidence to rule out a passive analysis.

## 3.4  Indefinite human interpretation

Another property for active impersonal constructions in Blevins (2003: 475, 481f.) was indefinite human interpretation of the implicit agent (i.e. subjectless impersonals have a uniform interpretation, whereas passives have not). In the Estonian (22), from Blevins (2003: 483), the fighters are indeed interpreted as being human (i.e. some indefinite group of people):

(22)    Õues        kakeldi.
        outside    fight.PAST.IMPS
        'People were fighting outside.'

However, such an analysis is not without problems. First, although indefinite human agency is often the most natural reading for the Balto-Finnic construction, it need not be the only reading available. According to e.g. Erelt et al (1993: 73) Estonian also allows animate (but non-human) readings, while Shore (1986: 19-21) has provided examples from Finnish where the action denoted by the verb is carried out by animals and even enzymes. Further examples of Finnish non-human/non-animate readings are given in (23):

(23) a. Messukeskuksessa          haukutaan        viikonvaihteessa.
        conference.hall.SG.INE    bark.IMPS        weekend.INE
        'There will be barking in the conference hall this weekend.'
                        (www3.soneraplaza.fi/matkalaukku/artikkeli/0,3448,197211,00.html)

     b. Sanovat,  että  luonto  on      viisas.  Mutta  mitä    viisautta      se
        say.3PL   that  nature  be.3SG  wise.  But    what   wisdom.PART  it

        on,     että ihmisen      psyykeä     rääkätään     tuollaisella?
        be.3SG that human.GEN  mind.PART  torture.IMPS    that.ADE
        'They say that the nature is wise. But what wisdom is it to torture
         a human mind with something like that?'
                            (http://www.verkkoklinikka.fi/discussion)

Although in (23) we could be dealing with some kind of personification so that human interpretation is still indirectly achieved, as also has been pointed out in Blevins (2003: 480f.), the tendency of a construction to receive such readings does not automatically exclude a passive analysis. Rather, indefinite human agency could be a common property of all subjectless forms, including impersonal, passive and, in many languages, subjectless third person plural forms. Siewierska (1984) also argues that indefinite human interpretation is a common property of impersonal passives cross-linguistically.[12]

    The idea that only verbs which allow human (or highly animate) subjects are expected to feed impersonalisation could be supported by the ill-formedness of data like the Finnish (24):

(24) a. *Ulkona  sarastettiin.
       outside    dawn.PAST.IMPS
       'Outside it was dawned.'
    b. *Korut          sisällettiin.
       jewellery.NOM  contain.PAST.IMPS
       'The jewellery was contained.'

Yet, there are also other ways to explain the ill-formedness of these examples. First, assuming – in line with both Blevins (2003) and Manninen & Nelson (2004) – that passivisation is an operation that reduces valency of the predicate by deleting an argument, we would not expect zero place predicates such as dawn in (24a) to feed this operation. Second, Siewierska (1984: 68f.) has shown that passivisation is in many languages restricted by factors such as affectedness. The English (25a) can be passivised as (25b) because the thief is thought to be affected by being held by the police, but (26a) cannot be passivised as (26b) because wine is not affected (at least not in the same way) by being held by the barrel:

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[12] Comrie (1981: 186-191) has observed that it is difficult to predict how and when animacy effects will manifest themselves in a language. Although matters such as default agreement and disambiguation of grammatical roles may be based on the animacy hierarchy, they are likely to interact with other systems, such as type of NP (proper name vs common noun phrase; pronoun vs 'full' noun phrase), thematic role, case, definiteness, and so on.

(25) a. The police held the thief.
  b. The thief was held by the police.
(26) a. The barrel held red wine.
  b. *Red wine was held by the barrel.

In (24b) it is equally questionable if the jewellery can be affected by the fact that it is being contained (e.g. by a box).

  In the light of the preceding discussion, we feel that the tendency to receive indefinite human interpretations does not provide a strong argument for reclassifying the Balto-Finnic construction as a subjectless impersonal, instead of an impersonal passive.

## 3.5 Reflexives

The next argument for classifying the Balto-Finnic impersonal construction as active and not passive, lies in the fact that the suppressed subject can still be syntactically active and serve as antecedent for a reflexive pronoun (Blevins 2003: 475) The deleted subject in a passive construction, on the other hand, can never be syntactically active. The well-formedness of the Estonian example (27), originally from Vihman (2001), seems to support this claim:

(27) Sooh, siis nüüd loetakse ja naerdakse ennast segaseks.
   so, then now read.IMPS and laugh.IMPS self.PART muddled.TRA
   'So now one reads and laughs oneself silly.'

However, data as in (28) show that Estonian 'suppressed subjects' can serve as antecedents only when the construction lacks an overt preverbal argument. When a preverbal argument is available, it is also the element serving as antecedent (Erelt et al 1993: 12; Hiietam 2003: Chapter 2):

(28) a. Vastu oma lubadusele, tõmmati Saksa
   contrary REFL.GEN promise.ALL draw.PAST.IMPS German

   peajõud, ..., Narvast tagasi ...
   main.force.PL.NOM N.ELA back
   'Contrary to one's promise, one pulled the German main forces...
    out of Narva...'       (www.eki.ee/corpus/)

  b. Lapsi              pandi              laua        äärde  oma          koha
    child.PL.NOM  put.PAST.IMPS  table.GEN at.ILL  REFL.GE N  seat.GEN

    peale        istuma.
    on.ALL      sit.SUP
    'One sat the child at the table at his/her own seat.'

In Finnish, the antecedent can never be a 'suppressed subject':

(29) a. *Sovituskopissa nähdään itsensä    isosta     peilistä.
    fitting.room.INE  see.IMPS self.3PX  big.ELA    mirror.ELA
   b. *Suihkussa voidaan  pestä      hiuksensa.
    shower.INE  can.IMPS  wash.INF  hair.3PX
(30) a. Mies        ammuttiin          kotona-an.
    man.NOM shoot.PAST.IMPS   home.ESS-3PX
    'The man$_i$ was shot in his$_{i/*j}$ home.'
   b. Häntä       kuunneltiin        elämä-nsä       loppuun     asti.
    he.PART   listen.PAST.IMPS  life.GEN-3PX    end.ILL        till
    'People listened to him$_i$ till the end of his$_{i/*j}$ life.'   (Iltalehti 27.2.2004)

Assuming that reflexivisation can serve as indication of an active syntactic subject, this argument for Estonian and Finnish cannot be seen as particularly strong: in Estonian, it can only be applied to a limited amount of data, whereas in Finnish it can be applied to no data at all.

## 3.6  Oblique agent phrases

Because the subject of an impersonal construction is merely suppressed, Blevins (2003: 485, 489) argues, it cannot be specified by an oblique agent phrase. Contrastingly, because the subject of a canonical passive is deleted, it can resurface in the form of an oblique agent phrase, if the language in question allows such phrases. Blevins' analysis therefore predicts that, if the Balto-Finnic construction is an active impersonal form, it should not allow oblique agent phrases.

The Estonian data in (31) seem to contradict the claim that we are dealing with an active impersonal form (31a is originally from Tuldava 1994: 273):

(31) a. Tartu ülikool      asutati              Gustav II Adolfi        poolt.
    Tartu university  found.PAST.IMPS  Gustav II Adolf.GEN   by
    'Tartu University was founded by Gustav II Adolf.'

b. Esimesed          välisdelegatsioonid        otsustati
    first.PL.NOM     foreign.delegation.PL.NOM  decide.PAST.IMPS

    Maanõukogu              poolt    jaanuaris    1918    saata
    District.magistrate.GEN  by      january.INE  1918    send.in

    Inglismaale,    Prantsusmaale, Rootsi,     Saksamaale   ja     Itaaliasse.
    England.ALL  France.ALL     Sweden.ILL Germany.ALL  and  Italy.ILL
    'The first foreign delegations were decided to send out to Engl-
    and, France, Sweden, Germany and Italy by the District
    Magistrates.' (Lit.: It was decided to send out, by the District
    Magistrate, ...)                              (www.eki.ee/corpus/)

Blevins argues that examples like (31a) are rare in Estonian and that their well-formedness is questionable. He also doubts if the postpositional *poolt*-phrase is really a semantic agent: Gustav II Adolf need not have founded the university himself, but merely allow it to be founded (by other people). However, Erelt et al (1993: 61, 66) argue that *poolt*-phrases can be treated as semantic agents in Estonian. Our Estonian informants report that this also is the only reading available in data like (31b).

The Finnish construction also allows the presence of an oblique agent phrase, formed with the postposition *toimesta* 'on.behalf.of'. Although (32a) may be ambiguous between a non-agentive and agentive reading (the emperor may or may not have built the castle himself), in (32b) the agentive reading is the only one available for all our Finnish informants:

(32) a. Linna          rakennettiin      keisarin        toimesta.
      castle.NOM  build.PAST.IMPS  emperor.GEN  on.behalf.of
      'The castle was built by the emperor.'
    b. Deathin     Chuck Schuldineria     muistellaan
      Death.GEN  Chuck Schuldiner.PART  reminisce.IMPS

      nimekkäiden     bändien        toimesta.
      famous.PL.GEN  band.PL.GEN  on.behalf.of
      'Death's Chuck Schuldiner will be reminisced about by many
      famous bands.'
        (www3.soneraplaza.fi/musiikki/artikkeli/,3634,6197_ 179829,00.html)

Given that the *poolt-* and *toimesta*-phrases can receive agentive readings in Balto-Finnic, (31) and (32) must be classified as examples of passivisation, even within the criteria discussed above.

**3.7  Summary**

In this section, we looked at several arguments for reclassifying the Balto-Finnic passive as a subjectless impersonal form. In section 3.1 we discussed the claim that there is no promotion to subject. We showed that the notion of a 'surface subject' is problematic in Balto-Finnic, because the position in question is first and foremost a topic position. We also showed that prototypical agent subjects and non-subjects end up in the same structural 'subject/topic' position in these languages. In sections 3.2 and 3.3 we discussed case marking and agreement. We illustrated that these phenomena are not linked to 'promotion to subject' in Balto-Finnic. We also argued that, both within the context of Balto-Finnic morphosyntax and cross-linguistically, the fact that the raising elements often retain their original case marking and trigger no agreement on the verb is not a problem for a passive analysis. In section 3.4 we discussed the tendency to receive indefinite human interpretations: we pointed out that cross-linguistically, this is again not a problem for a passive analysis. In sections 3.5 and 3.6 we focussed on the argument that the Balto-Finnic construction has a syntactically active suppressed subject. In the case of reflexivisation, we showed that the languages offer very little support for this claim, and in the case of oblique agent phrases, they actually contradict it. Our overall conclusion is, then, that Blevins has offered no convincing arguments for reclassifying the Balto-Finnic impersonal passive as a subjectless impersonal form.

# 4   The Zero Person

In this section, we look briefly at another class of constructions in Balto-Finnic, referred to as the 'zero person' or the 'missing person' construction. We will show that, unlike the construction that we call an impersonal passive, the zero person construction actually follows the criteria for subjectless impersonal forms. We take this as evidence that the constructions are formed by two different operations: passivisation and impersonalisation, respectively.

In both Finnish and Estonian, the zero person construction has received relatively little attention in the past. The authors that do discuss it (e.g. Hakulinen & Karttunen 1973, Hakulinen & Karlsson 1979: 253f., Vainikka 1989, Laitinen 1995, Vilkuna 1996: 138-143, Vainikka & Levy 1999: 656-658 for Finnish) agree that it is a generic construction where the finite verb appears in the third person singular form. Although the entity performing or undergoing the action denoted by the verb is left unexpressed, it is interpreted as being an indefinite 'one'. Like the impersonal passive, the zero person construction may

be formed of nearly all classes of verbs, including intransitive (33b-c) and copular verbs (33d):[13]

(33) a. Metsästä    löytää    helposti   mustikoita.
     forest.ELA   find.3SG   easily     blueberries.PART
     'One finds blueberries easily in the forest.'        (Vainikka & Levy 1999: 656)

   b. Tässä    istuu    mukavasti.
     here     sit.3SG   comfortably
     'One can sit comfortably here.'                      (Holmberg 2004: 1)

   c. Jos   elää       vanhaksi,   hyötyy      enemmän,   ja   jos
     if    live.3SG   old.SG.TRA   benefit.3SG  more,             and  if

     kuolee     nuorena,       ei         välttämättä  ehdi
     die.3SG    young.SG.ESS   not.3SG     necessarily  have.time.PRES

     saada    mitään.
     get.INF  anything
     'If one lives to be old, then one will benefit more, and if one
     dies young, then one won't necessarily have time to earn
     anything.' (i.e. benefit financially from having a life insurance)
                                                        (Ylioppilaslehti 18/2003)

   d. Kun    on       väsynyt,        pitää      mennä  nukkumaan.
     when   be.3SG   tired.SG.NOM    must.3SG   go.INF  sleep.INF.ILL
     'When one is tired, one should go to bed.'

These data also show that the preverbal position in the zero person construction, just like the preverbal position in the impersonal passive, may either remain empty (33c-d) or be filled by a locative or temporal adverbial (33a-b). The verb-initial constructions are usually only possible under some special circumstances: the verb-initial impersonal passive, as we have seen in section 3.1, is limited to contexts where a contrastive interpretation is sought for, while the verb-initial zero person construction is usually part of an if…then frame (33c; see also Hakulinen & Karlsson 1979: 254, Vilkuna 1996: 140) or an adverbial kun 'when' construction (33d; see also Holmberg 2004).14 In all other contexts, the

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[13] In Estonian, the zero person construction is less well known than in Finnish: it is not entirely clear, at this point, whether this construction has the same properties, or the same form, as its Finnish counterpart. Therefore, for our discussion, we have chosen to give examples from only Finnish.

[14] In Estonian, the *if... then* frame seems to make more frequent use of the impersonal passive than of the zero person form. Whether the preverbal position in the Finnish construction is filled by a covert argument or is genuinely empty is beyond the purposes of this paper; the idea that the zero person construction contains a covert argument is discussed in e.g. Vainikka & Levy (1999) and Holmberg (2004).

preverbal position must be filled by an overt XP capable of functioning as a topic (Vainikka & Levy 1999, Holmberg 2004):[15]

(34) a. ?*Voi      anoa        lainaa        pankista.
         can.3SG   apply.INF   loan.PART     bank.ELA
     b. Pankista    voi        anoa         lainaa.
        bank.ELA    can.3SG    apply.INF    loan.PART
     c. Lainaa      voi        anoa         pankista.
        loan.PART   can.3SG    apply.INF    bank.ELA
        'One can apply for a loan at the bank.'            (Vainikka & Levy 1999:657)

Despite superficial similarities, there are a number of differences between the impersonal passive and the zero person construction, which suggest that they are products of two different operations. First, unlike the impersonal passive, the zero person construction has no special morphological marking. Assuming, in line with Manninen & Nelson (2004), that morphemes like the Finnish *–taan/-tiin* are overt realisations of a passive feature on a relevant v, we take the absence of such morphemes to suggest that the construction is not a passive. Hence, the fact that the entity performing or undergoing the action denoted by the verb is left unexpressed need not be a result of argument deletion.

Second, the zero person construction is strictly limited to readings where the implied argument is human (Vainikka & Levy 1999: 656-658, Vilkuna 1996: 141). This is exactly what we would expect of Blevins' subjectless impersonal forms, and contrasts with the impersonal passive data discussed in section 3.[16] Third, we have shown that in the impersonal passive, an underlying full object NP can surface either in the nominative (35a) or partitive (35b) case, depending on the intended interpretation (e.g. definite or indefinite). In the zero person construction, however, full object NPs tend to retain their object case: they can surface either in the accusative (36a) or partitive (36b) case, again depending on the intended interpretation (all data based on Vilkuna 1996: 142):

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[15] Vainikka & Levy (1999: 657) give the same translation for (34b-c). We argue, however, that the sentences differ in their distribution of given and new information: in (34b) the bank is the topic (given information) and the fact that you can apply for a loan from there is new information. In (34c) the roles are reversed.

[16] Holmberg (2004) argues that the zero person construction contains a lexically null generic pronoun which is interpreted as being human; the interpretive restriction could originate from the generic pronoun itself, or it could be assigned by default. This is parallel to Blevins' (2003: 481) claim that a lexically unspecified subject has a tendency to receive human interpretations.

(35) a. Täällä nähtiin        kerran silkkiuikku.
      here   see.PAST.IMPS once   great.crested.grebe.NOM
      'A great crested grebe was seen here once.'
    b. Täällä nähtiin        kerran silkkiuikkuja.
      here   see.PAST.IMPS once   great.crested.grebe.PL.PART
      'Great crested grebes were seen here once.'
(36) a. Täällä näkee      joskus       silkkiuikun.
      here   see.3SG   sometimes  great.crested.grebe.ACC
      'Here one can sometimes see a great crested grebe.'
    b. Täällä näkee      joskus       silkkiuikkuja.
      here   see.3SG   sometimes  great.crested.grebe.PL.PART
      'Here one can sometimes see great crested grebes.'

The fact that object NPs retain their accusative case in the zero person construction suggests that this construction is active, rather than passive, on the usual assumption that active constructions allow accusative case, passive constructions do not. Therefore, case considerations support a different line of analysis for the impersonal passive and zero person constructions.

In section 3.2 we also proposed that Balto-Finnic impersonal passives do not pattern syntactically with 'synthetic verb forms that incorporate a subject argument.' This proposal was based on the fact that the missing subject in this construction cannot be overtly expressed. The Finnish (37) shows, on the other hand, that the zero construction follows the predictions for impersonal forms, in that its subject argument can be optionally overtly expressed. We take the well-formedness of data like (37) to suggest, again, that the impersonal passive and the zero person construction are products of two different operations:

(37)   Jos (joku)       panee    lapsen       vuoteeseen, …
      if   (some/one) put.3SG   child.ACC   bed.ILL
      'If (some/one) puts the child in bed, …'

In section 3.3 we discussed agreement phenomena: we showed that in the impersonal passive, the finite verb has the same form, irrespective of the person and number features of the preverbal subject/topic (if any). We argued that, within the context of Balto-Finnic morphosyntax, this is not a problem for a passive analysis because these languages do not require agreement even between active finite verbs and the preverbal subject/topic. Furthermore, we pointed out that even cross-linguistically, the lack of agreement is not problematic, because passive finite verbs tend to exhibit very different agreement patterns from their corresponding active verbs.

As for the zero person construction, data like (38a) show that the finite verb surfaces in the active third person singular form, irrespective of the person and

number features of the preverbal XP. (38b-c) show, in turn, that predicative adjectives and nouns also surface in the third person singular form:

(38) a. Jos   runon          /runot          lukee      läpi, …
         if    poem.SG.ACC /poem.PL.ACC read.3SG  through, …
         'If one reads the poem/poems through, …'
    b. Jos   on           nälkäinen /  *nälkäisiä,  pitää …
         if    be.3SG      hungry.SG/ hungry.PL    must.3SG
         'If one is hungry, one must …'   (Vilkuna 1996: 141)
    c. Jos   ei          ole          aikuinen    /  *aikuisia,      ei…
         if    not.3SG    be.PRES    adult.NOM.SG/ adult.NOM.PL   not.3SG
         'If one isn't an adult, one cannot…'

We take the fact that finite verbs and predicative XPs appear in the third person singular form, i.e. the default form, to support an analysis of the zero construction as a subjectless impersonal form. In other words, if impersonalisation is an operation which suppresses the realisation of a surface subject but allows this subject to still be syntactically active, as Blevins (2003: 512) argues, then data like (38) can be taken to show that the finite verb and the predicative XP still agree with (the features of) a syntactically active covert subject (in the impersonal passive, predicative XPs can surface either in the singular or plural, so they do not provide evidence for a syntactically active covert subject).

   Further evidence for argument suppression, rather than argument deletion, in the zero person construction comes from data like (39). These examples show that, unlike the impersonal passive (29), the implied argument in the zero construction is able to bind reflexives and other anaphora – similar observations are made in Hakulinen & Karlsson (1979: 254), Vilkuna (1996: 141), Vainikka & Levy (1999: 657-8) and Holmberg (2004):

(39) a. Sovituskopissa          näkee       itsensä       isosta      peilistä.
         fitting.room.INE        see.3SG     self.3PX      big.ELA     mirror.ELA
         'In a fitting room one sees oneself in a big mirror.'
    b. Suihkussa        voi        pestä          hiuksensa.
         shower.INE       can.3SG  wash.INF      hair.3PX
         'In the shower one can wash his/her hair.'

The data in (40) show that, when the preverbal position in the zero construction is occupied by an overt argument, reflexives can be bound by either the overt or the implied argument. This again contrasts with the impersonal passive data, which allow binding by the overt argument only (Finnish) or by the covert

argument if there is no overt argument present (Estonian). These facts suggest, then, that we are dealing with an independent syntactic construction.[17]

(40) a. Jos  miehen     ampuu       kotona-an,       niin …
       if    man.ACC    shoot.3SG   home.ESS-3PX   then
       'If one shoots a man$_i$ in one's/his$_i$ home, then…'
   b. Jos  häntä       kuuntelee  elämä-nsä       loppuun asti, niin…
       if    he.PART  listen.3SG   life.GEN-3PX   end.ILL   till  then
       'If one listens to him$_i$ till the end of one's/his$_i$ life, then…'

Finally, the suppressed subject of an impersonal, unlike the deleted subject of a passive, cannot be specified by an oblique agent phrase. In (41a), the toimesta-phrase can only get an agentive reading, i.e. the fans are the ones doing the reminiscing. In (41b), however, the toimesta-phrase can only get a causative reading, i.e. the fans make someone else reminisce about the guitarist. Therefore, (41a) must be classified as an example of subject deletion (i.e. passivisation), (41b) of subject suppression (i.e. impersonalisation):

(41) a. Kun   kitaristia       muistellaan       fanien    toimesta, …
       when  guitarist.PART reminisce.IMPS   fans.GEN on.behalf.of
       'When the guitarist is reminisced about by the fans, …'
   b. Kun kitaristia         muistelee        fanien    toimesta, …
       when guitarist.PART   reminisce.3SG    fans.GEN on.behalf.of
       'When the fans make one reminisce about the guitarist, …'

In summing up, this section has illustrated that the criteria listed by Blevins (2003) for identifying active subjectless constructions in Baltic-Finnic, namely promotion to surface subject position, case marking, agreement, indefinite human interpretation of the covert agent, reflexivisation properties of the covert element and ability to combine with oblique agent phrases correctly characterise the zero person construction where the verb cluster stands in the default form and there is not overt agent present. Based on the facts that it allows accusative case marked arguments, always needs the agent to be a human singular referent, allows reflexivisation by both the covert and the overt argument and does not accept oblique agent phrases, we take it to be a product of a different syntactic operation than impersonal passive constructions despite superficial similarities.

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[17] Although reflexivisation helps us set passivisation and impersonalisation apart, even among genetically related languages these two operations seem not to be uniform. In view of the present facts, we can claim that the Finnish passive and the Estonian periphrastic construction pair with the typologically canonical passive construction, whereas the Estonian impersonal passive construction maps better with the zero person construction in terms of reflexivisation.

# 5   Conclusion

This paper discussed the characteristics of the Balto-Finnic impersonal construction. We show that the construction displays a number of properties that are typical of a passive that is formed by argument deletion, but unexpected if it is an active impersonal formed by argument suppression. For example, the construction has special passive morphology, it displays standard nominative-accusative case alternation, and there is no syntactically active covert argument which would bind reflexives and other anaphora. The construction also allows the presence of oblique agent phrases.

   We also showed that the criteria posited for impersonal active constructions in Blevins (2003) fail to capture the Balto-Finnic impersonal passive. However, they easily capture another class of constructions referred to as the 'missing person' or the 'zero person' construction. Although at first sight the two constructions may appear to be similar, they differ to such an extent that they must be products of different syntactic operations: argument deletion and argument suppression, respectively.

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