

The passive voice transformation

The passive is often less direct than the active and serves a useful function when a person wants to emphasize the object or when the actor is unimportant or unknown:

1. My house was destroyed by the storm.
2. I've been stung.
3. He was wounded in battle.

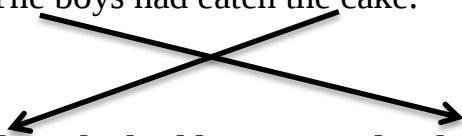
Because transformations affect form, two surface structures may be different but share the same deep structure:

1a. Walter saw me.



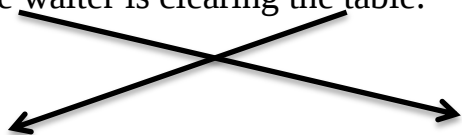
b. I was seen by Walter.

2a. The boys had eaten the cake.



b. The cake had been eaten by the boys.

3a. The waiter is clearing the table.



b. The table is being cleared by the waiter.

- In each of these pairs of sentences the two noun phrases have been interchanged.
- What happens is an auxiliary expansion.
- It should be obvious now that **be** + **en** has been added between the auxiliary and the verb.
- **en** is the abbreviation for “past participle of.”
- In passive sentences the same past participle occurs, but it follows a form of be: was seen, was eaten, was torn, was slammed, was opened, was set, was hit.

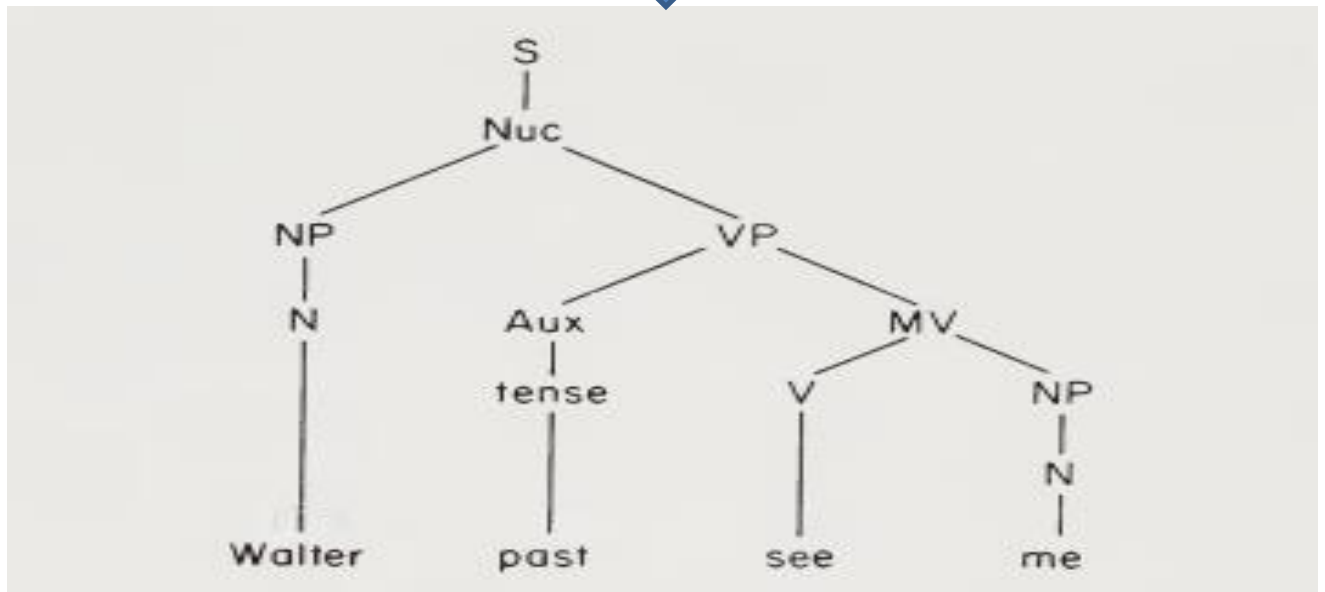
Active NP1 + Aux + V + NP2

Passive NP2 + Aux + be + en + V + by + NP1

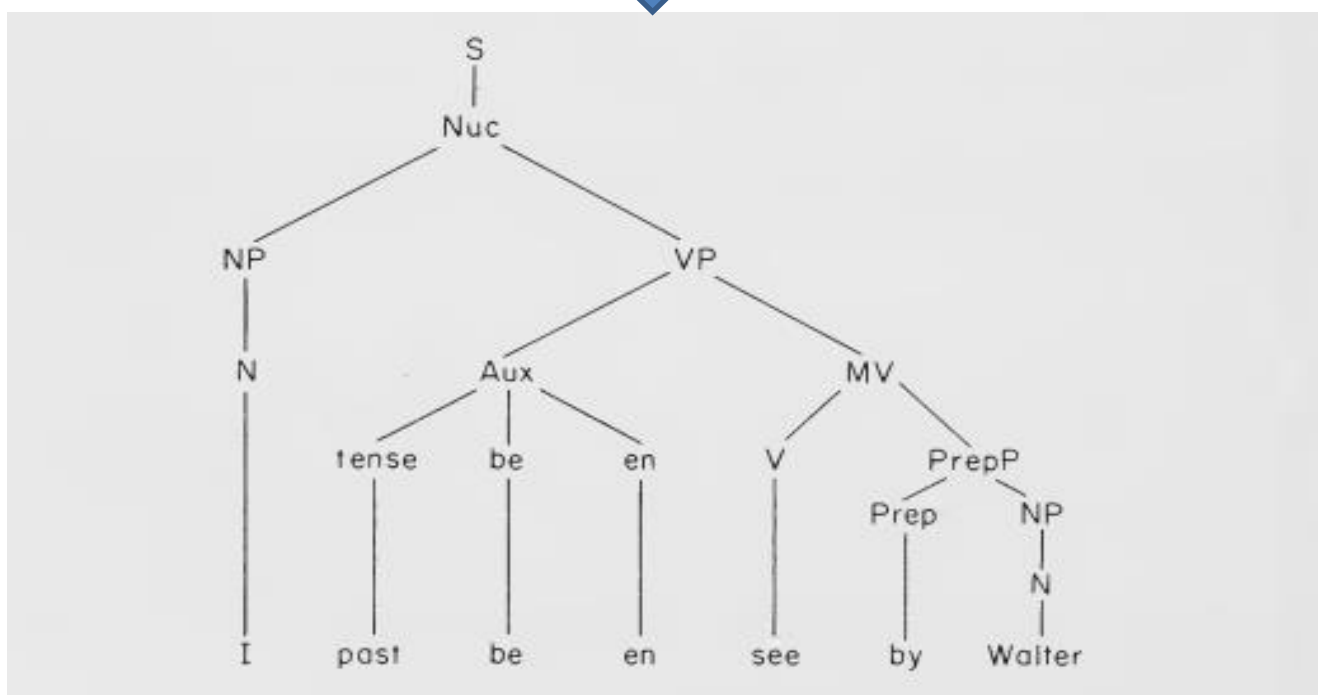
Look at the two sentences (surface structures) which has the same deep structure:

- Walter saw me. (original)
- I was seen by Walter. (derived)

The deep structure



The derived structure



Not all verbs that have noun phrases following them may undergo the passive transformation:

1. Bill has a cold. *A cold is had by Bill.
2. The book cost a dollar. *A dollar was cost by the book.
3. The box contained a secret.
4. That dress suits her personality perfectly.

- Sometimes the deep structure subject is vague, as in these sentences:

- 1a. Someone signed the paper.
- 2a. Someone has found the car.
- 3a. Something stung me.

By the passive transformation these can become:

- 1b. The paper was signed by someone.
- 2b. The car has been found by someone.
- 3b. I was stung by something.

- We may apply the deletion transformation to the prepositional phrase containing the indefinite someone or something:

- 1.c. The paper was signed.
- 2c. The car has been found.
- 3c. I was stung.

Only indefinites or other obvious NPs, such as

-The defendant was found guilty (by the jury) may be deleted.

The listener must always be able to understand what has been deleted.

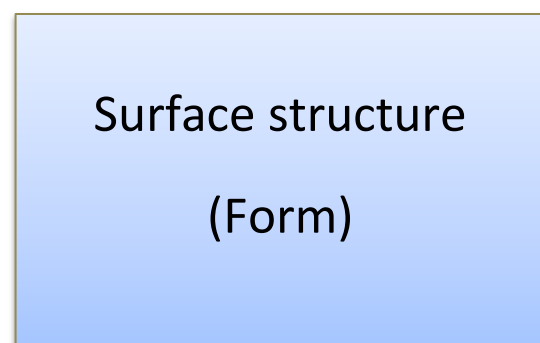
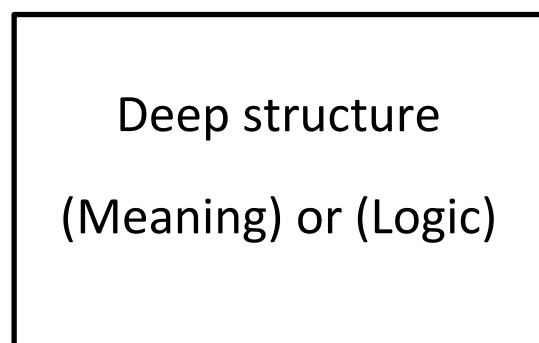
- Grammarians in the past were often concerned with the meaning of the terms **subject of** and **object of** In the sentence:

Her husband **washed** **the dishes**
 (Subject :Actor) (Object : Receiver) ←(thematic roles)

- Some grammarians spoke of the dishes as being the grammatical subject but logical object.

The dishes **were washed** **by her husband**
 (Gr. Subject : logical object) (Gr. Object : Logical subject)

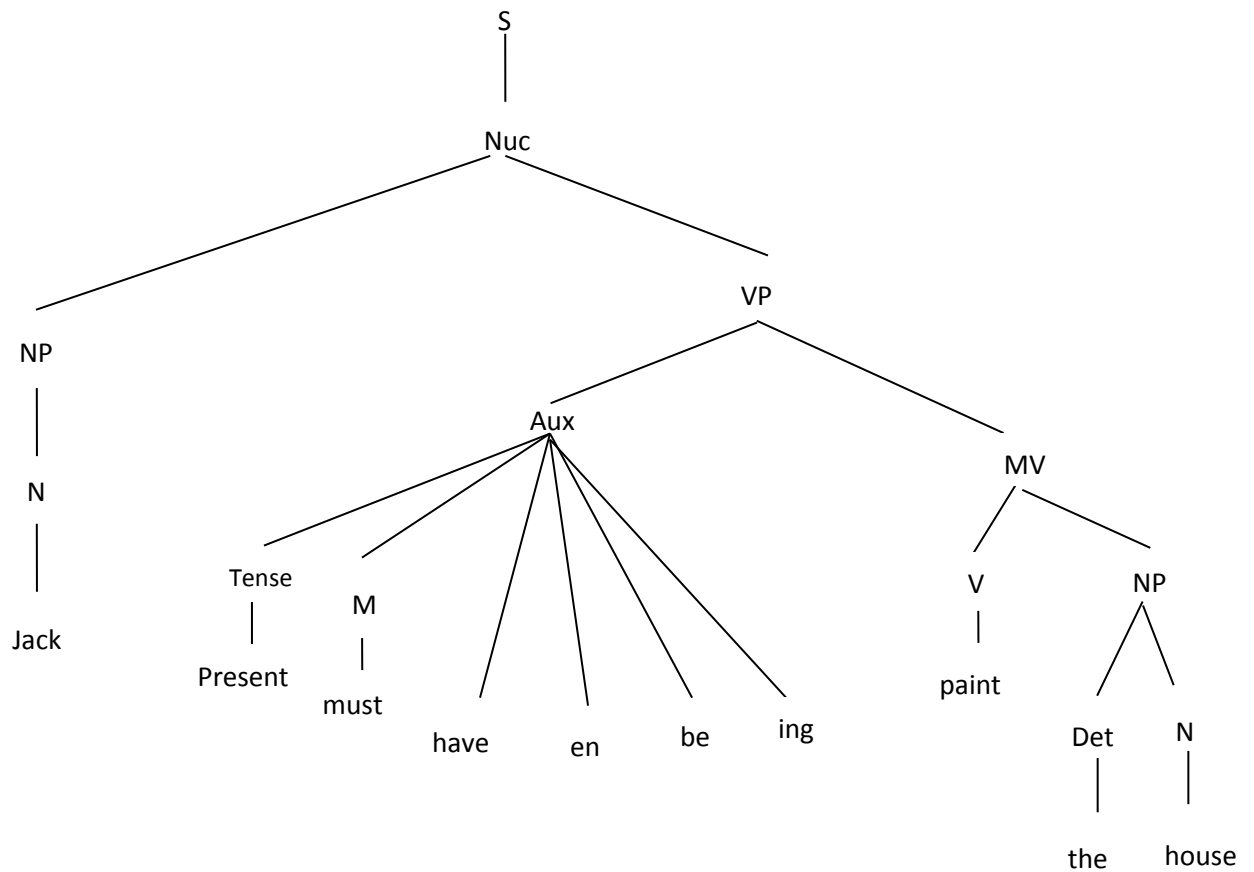
- In transformational grammar there is no problem. Such functions as subject and object have meaning only at a specific level, and these functions do not necessarily correspond among levels.
- Hence, in the **deep structure**:
- **her husband** is the **subject** and the **dishes** is the **object**.
- In the surface structure, however, the dishes is the subject and her husband the object of a preposition.
- Since meaning is reflected in the deep structure and form in the surface structure, there is no problem of “logical subject” and “grammatical subject.”



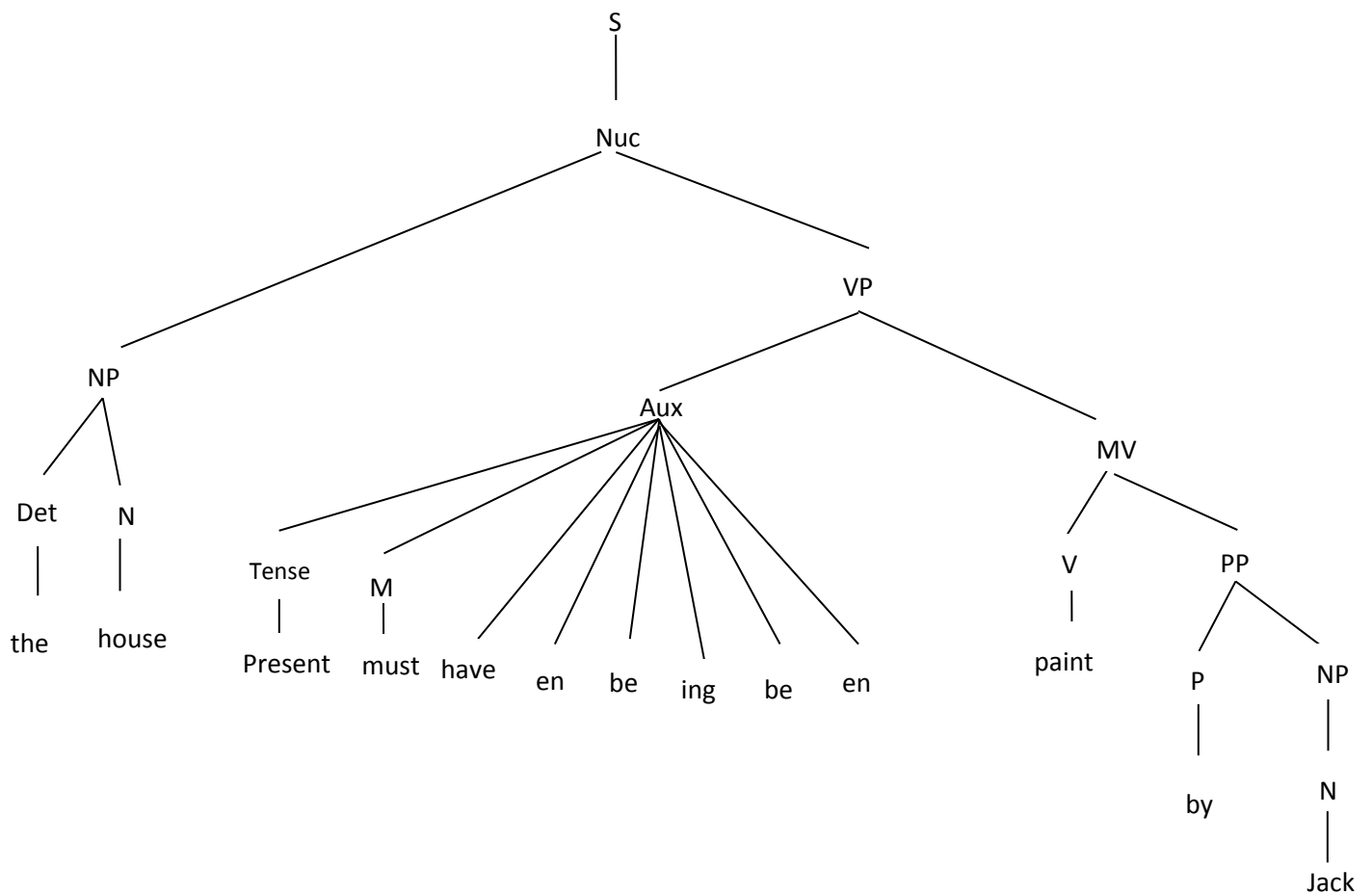
Let`s try to perform the passive transformation to the following sentence:

- Jack must have been painting the house.

NP + Present + M + have + en + be + ing + V + NP



NP2 + Present + M + have + en + be + ing + be + en + paint + by + NP1



Result → The house must have been being painted by jack.